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"Great Writers."

*LIFE OF JOHN RUSKIN.*





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LIFE

OF

*Biog*

JOHN RUSKIN.



BY

ASHMORE WINGATE.



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TO  
LLORA F. WATSON,  
THE LIFE OF THE GREATEST OF ART CRITICS,  
TO ONE WHO IS AN ARTIST.





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(1819-43.)

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# LIFE OF RUSKIN.

## FIRST QUARTER.

PARENTAGE—EARLY LIFE—FIRST BOOKS

(1819-43).

### CHAPTER I.

[1819-33.]

WATERLOO was won at Moscow. By this we mean that the Russian campaign, by extirpating a large part of the soldierly manhood of France, and giving the necessary breathing-space to the many enemies of Napoleon, thereby dooming him, with one nation at his back, to fight a world, while Wellington, with a world at his back, fought one nation, the Russian campaign may be held as the remote cause of the Belgian victory.

X And this historical *mot* proves to be a very useful text, from which many sermons can be preached if necessary. For in almost every life it will be found that some antecedent circumstance, often some very small thing indeed, must at the last analysis have been the seed of what appears as an isolated phenomenon and glory. So we do



not think it any exaggeration to assert that if the father of John Ruskin had sold a few hundreds of butts of sherry less his son would not have attained the almost pontifical position—for so it came to be—that he has held in the æsthetic domain of our own time.

Few men of genius have owed so much to preceding external conditions of environment as John Ruskin owed to them; and this statement is, of course, to be considered in connection with the truth that the sphere in which John Ruskin was (and is) great, is a sphere to which only a man rich and far-travelled could gain entrance, even in much later days than those which saw the issue of *Modern Painters*. The farmer Burns required not much more than his own genius, and some cheap writing-paper, to take the world by assault; Madame Albani would conceivably have needed nothing of importance beyond her voice and some evening gowns; G. F. Watts had the expense of a few informal years at an art school. But to acquaint oneself with all the best paintings in four-fifths of the galleries of Europe, spending five guineas in driving to see a particular etching, having a scaffold erected in a cathedral chapel, making presents to abbots to gain private views of things not else to be seen, to give to one's criticisms the wide range of a Bædeker's Handbook—all this involves an enormous expenditure. Imagination is a cheap thing, but observation is a dear thing. And Ruskin's life was one long observation, redeemed, of course, by imagination, inspiration, and eloquence.

While we do not say, and would never dream of saying, that Ruskin, if born in a less fortunate position, would not have been a great man, we do say that he would not have been our foremost artistic philosopher. And now, with this short apology, some little time may be spent in considering his parentage and early years, chiefly in the light shed by his own loving memories.

The father, John Ruskin, senior, was a man of a remarkable type, who combined an extraordinary keenness in his trade of wine-merchant with tireless appreciation of all beauty, whether real or ideal, whether amid the peaks of the Apennines or in the works of the noblest poets, a man of the sort whose scarcity was deplored by Matthew Arnold in the course of his reflections upon a nation of Philistines. He came of a race originally English, but resident latterly in Edinburgh, and lastly in Perth, and seems to have had a somewhat unpractical and even spendthrift being for his immediate progenitor, according to all accounts; assuredly, the author of *Præterita* is very reticent concerning his grandsire, and where he is reticent others do not require to be communicative.

But it must be recorded that John Ruskin, senior, while yet a youth in the Fair City, had the mortification of seeing his father declining both physically and financially, and ultimately stood, a man entirely penniless, by the death-bed of an unfortunate bankrupt. Then, indeed, he showed what manner of soul he possessed. He went finally to London, where he had served already in various capacities,

entered the wine trade, worked for nine consecutive years without one holiday, and paid off every one of the paternal debts. He left the house in Perth in the hands of his sister Jessie, and during a whole decade it is doubtful if the brother and sister saw each other at all. There was self-denial in all this, but nothing to the self-denial involved in the further truth, now to be put on record, that, for the whole period of this drudgery without holiday, he and his cousin, Miss Cox, resident at Croydon, were engaged to be married; the attachment had, it appears, begun while she was keeping house for her uncle (his father) in the North, towards the close of the life of the latter.

The father of Miss Cox, and consequently the maternal grandfather of the great writer, had been a promising young man in the merchant service, who might one day have become captain of an East Indiaman—in those days a highly genteel post—but unfortunately died at thirty-two, after a fall from his horse in the Market Street of Croydon; as for his widow, she became proprietress of the King's Head Inn, and prospered there in a moderate way, but saw her family established, not as innkeepers, but as bakers.

So the marriage contracted by John Ruskin, senior, does not seem to have been one calculated to advance any social ambitions, ambitions of becoming a prince of commerce, "a merchant," as De Quincey says of some one in the *Opium-Eater*, "in the large, noble sense of England and Florence." Indeed, the son, in a passage of his memoirs, is found regretting



that his mother always felt a diffidence in mixing with the society in which the continually improving position of his father ought to have enabled the little family to move. But in itself, regarded as the union of two hearts and hands without any recognition of exterior consequences, the marriage was altogether happy and delightful, and for this circumstance there can be little doubt that the nine years' engagement is to be gratefully considered.<sup>1</sup>

The amiable and well-matched couple, after living in more humble and democratic neighbourhoods, went to reside in Hunter Street, Brunswick Square, not at this present date very fashionable, but in the period of George the Fourth, and Waterloo, and Almack's, the kind of genteel place upon which Thackeray loved to glance his sarcasm. And here it was that their child first saw the light, revealed amid chimney-pots and slates, it is true, but still the same light that filled God's universe for him by-and-by.

John Ruskin, senior, had been for some years leading partner, or nominal leading partner, in the firm of Ruskin, Telford & Domecq, importers of wine, principally sherry, and carried on a business that became very prosperous indeed, in an old, dingy house in Billiter Street. None but the very

<sup>1</sup> When one considers how a personality that fascinates for a week might well pall upon one if one were tied for thirty years to it, one realizes that the parties should know each other better than a year's engagement permits. An unscrupulous man can keep up an appearance of virtue for a year or so, but not so easily for three years, say.

best article ever arrived at or left the cellars of the house, and M. Domecq, who was a naturalized Frenchman of Spanish extraction, and did the vine-growing for his merchant associates, made sure of the necessary age by having an immensely long tubular vault, putting the tuns in at one end and refusing to draw one out except at the other end.<sup>1</sup>

The three men never seem to have disagreed among themselves; they never deceived a customer, never failed a customer, and never overcharged a customer, and finally died very rich. All this the great art critic must have had in mind when, in his works on social and business life, he condemned what he considered to be the degenerate and feverish methods of a younger generation,—only he forgot that money was more easily made in the time of his father than in his own.

John Ruskin, senior, then, having such a comfortable business in the city, was able to have a luxurious home to which to return in the late afternoons for an evening of quiet pleasure; though, being a man of simple tastes in material enjoyments, he did not have one as luxurious as he might have had, or as most people in his place would nowadays have. While his child was yet a young infant, he himself was compelled to remain rather long in the office; but as years passed, and things became more and more flourishing, he escaped sooner from bondage, and saw more and more of domestic felicity. The philoprogenitive and somewhat old-fashioned man

<sup>1</sup> This was the arrangement for what the firm considered their standard wine.

loved nothing so much as to hear small feet descending the stair just as he and his wife finished dessert. The being whose one great loss in later life, according to Dr. Robertson Nicoll, was the want of being loved, and consequently of loving, assuredly received a cornucopia of love and of tender regard from his parents, who all along seem to have suspected, and blindly cultivated in him, a seed of genius. Curiously enough, their idea was that he should enter the Church, and certainly there were visible some inclinations in an ecclesiastical direction as the infant became a boy; for example, one of his highest delights was to hold a miniature service "over the red sofa-cushions" in the drawing-room; but the sermon contained not many more words than these, "People, be good!" Practically, the continual text of every pulpit, all the same.

It was from his mother that the devotional instinct came—it nearly always is from the mother—but undoubtedly the father also, shrewd man of business as he was, had full sympathy with it; only, with him the dreams of religious triumph took, as was to be expected, a more materialistic form; and many years later, when the success of *Modern Painters* had received a momentary check, his heart repented him of the thing that now was, and he said to a friend, "with tears in his eyes, 'He (John) would have been a bishop!'"

But now, to keep to the main subject, Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin felt justified in moving from Hunter Street to a house in the suburb of Herne Hill, a more stately residence altogether, in the year 1823.



So that John, having been born in 1819, would be four years of age at the time of flitting. "The house," says the author of *Præterita*, "had front and back garden in sufficient proportion to its size; the front richly set with old evergreens, and well-grown lilac and laburnum; the back seventy yards long by twenty wide, renowned all over the hill for its pears and apples, which had been chosen with extreme care by our predecessor (shame on me to forget the name of a man to whom I owe so much), and also possessing a strong old mulberry tree, a white-heart cherry-tree, a black Kentish one, and an almost unbroken hedge all round, of alternate gooseberry and currant bush; decked in all due season (for the ground was wholly beneficent), with magical splendour of abundant fruit: fresh green, soft amber, and rough-bristled crimson bending the spinous branches; clustered pearl and pendant ruby joyfully discoverable under the large leaves that looked like vine."

To this little paradise the wine-merchant returned sharply at half-past four; and as soon as he returned he dined, and subsequently partook of tea under the white-heart cherry, where his wife and son joined him. The whole evening, when the weather was sufficiently warm, was spent in the garden—a custom that ought to be followed as widely as possible,—so that young John Ruskin saw a great deal more of the charms and the wonders of the sky, of birds, and of flowers, than most dwellers in the suburbs.

But there were times when the father had to act the part of his own commercial traveller, and on

these occasions the pleasures of Herne Hill were exchanged for the pleasures of the road, of the inn, of the post-chaise. For many of these journeys the trio gratefully availed themselves of the kindness of Mr. Telford in offering them the use of his carriage, a vehicle so highly swung as to allow the small personage, seated on his own little travelling-trunk between his parents, the widest possible horizon, and the first view of all the ancient abbeys and aristocratic seats which they approached: it was only in later years that Mr. Ruskin deemed himself justified in keeping a carriage of his own. Much of the best scenery in England and Scotland was viewed in this way, and, what is more important, in a leisurely manner.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes a visit was made to Perth to the house of Mr. Ruskin's sister and her husband, who was a tanner; and John then had what it is a great pity that he did not have all along, the constant society of other children, and that in one of the most delightful playgrounds of the world, the plains of the Tay. While the family were at home in London there were

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin himself is always insisting upon the fact that to rush through a district—to “do” it, as the Americans say—is not to see it at all. The grand tour is supposed to open the mind of the islander; but if he accomplish it in corridor trains at sixty miles an hour, does it? And Mr. Mortimer Menpes—or is it his daughter?—in the exquisite *Japan*, points out that the human mind cannot take in a mass of beauty easily, and therefore cannot take it in quickly. Therefore a Japanese will spend hours watching one piece of hawthorn blossom. The idea was acquired by Ruskin, at a very young age, of stopping for hours to gaze at some particular aspect of something in a manner impossible to the traveller of to-day.

lessons to be learned and said before twelve o'clock, as well as an examination in religious knowledge on the Sunday evenings; but at Perth there seems to have been a respite from the former, which permitted John to roam about the "Inches" with his girl cousins all day long. The author of *Præterita* has very little recollection of his father's actual company at Perth. No doubt the good man, finding the memories and associations connected with the city too painful, usually left his wife and child there and spent the time in visiting old Highland customers and in canvassing for new ones. So the boy, not so continually under the parental eye, ventured on small excursions into that wonderful world that he came to interpret so well long after; he learned not to be afraid that the cliffs of Kinnoul Hill would fall upon him, likewise to love, not to dread, the beautiful calm, "pausing" river. Finally, the future art critic, being at the time nine years of age or so, rashly decided on one of these visits to marry his cousin Jessie, who was probably a year younger!

Then it was Herne Hill again, and the delights of sitting in his own little alcove by the drawing-room chimney and hearing his father, who had a fine ear and a fine voice, read Byron, Scott, or Rogers to his mother, while the autumn dusk fell on the suburbs. Every season of the year seems to have brought its own pleasures: now the delights of faring forth to visit enchanted places; for example, of arriving near Abbotsford and catching a glimpse of the already failing Sir Walter, and now the joy of lying on the deep orchard grass at home and gazing



over the trees into the depths of the sky, hearing something of the murmur of the universe in the air.

We have written of lessons religious and secular to be learned and said; and it is worth noting that the basis of all the early teaching received by John Ruskin was the English Bible. Once a year the whole book had to be gone through from beginning to end, and any passage not properly read had to be read again; all this was tedious at the time, but the pupil afterwards was grateful for it, both as a moral and a mental discipline. There were also home-lessons in Latin grammar and the best early education in Art—namely, a few good drawings, miniatures, and illustrated editions of books to look at. A taste for architecture was foreshadowed in the continual use made of “two boxes of well-cut wooden bricks.”

From the first John showed a plausible preference of being an informer to being informed, except as regards the wild things of Nature; for he attempted original literary works almost as soon as he knew his letters, having at the age of six read Miss Edgeworth's *Frank* and *Harry and Lucy*, together with *Dame Wiggins of Lee*, *The Peacock at Home*, and even part of *Manfred*; he began a year later what he considered a continuation and improvement of the second of these tales of Miss Edgeworth, and curiously contrived to introduce therein knowledge gleaned from Joyce's *Scientific Educator*.

But a circumstance had occurred in 1829, or thereabouts, which broke in upon the child's solitary elysium in the Herne Hill house and garden, making

him put one foot at least into an outer world of regular and unwelcome scholarship. The Perth aunt having unfortunately died, her daughter Mary, "a clumsily-built, pretty girl," came to live with the wine-merchant and his wife, and was sent out every morning to a school for young ladies near at hand; and this set the good couple thinking of their own son and his future and the inadvisability of his being left alone all through the long hours of the day and hindering his cousin with her own preparation at night. So it was arranged that John should undergo a strict course of classical study with the Rev. Dr. Andrews—a gentlemanly and old-fashioned non-conformist minister in Walworth, and a friend of Coventry Patmore.

In 1831, after a year and some odd months had been passed in this uneventful way, both the cousins commenced the study of drawing in some systematic manner under a Mr. Runciman, whom the author of *Præterita* never ceased to blame for having spoiled his natural "force of line," substituting for it something worse, according to the affected ideals of that day. Drawing, it may be said, was a hereditary gift with the boy, for in his own younger days John Ruskin, senior, had given evidence of considerable power in the direction of the Fine Arts, as also in that of the Belles Lettres.

Then came the year 1832, bringing fuel to the young flame of genius in the shape of a present of Rogers' *Italy*, illustrated by Turner, from Mr. Telford; indeed, the gift brought about a crisis in the life of the art-critic, and the chapter may close with

1833, when Dr. Andrews' tuition proving, or seeming to prove, insufficient, he was taken and enrolled in the school for the sons of gentlemen, kept by the Rev. Thomas Dale in Grove Lane, an abode of learning where nothing particular happened to him one way or another.

But it is worth while giving so much consideration to these childish times as we have given, for from the greatest after-developments of a life that bulked so largely in the nineteenth century one can generally work back to some early feature in them; for example, one can parallel the religious element in *Fors Clavigera* and the *Construction of Sheepfolds* with the teaching received from the evangelical mother; the appreciation of the beauty of things in the later volumes of *Modern Painters*, with the author's youthful observations of the charms and the wonders of the sky, of the birds, and of the flowers, of which he saw so much more than most dwellers in the suburbs; and lastly, the later dislike of our luxurious modern travels and everything contributing to their speed with an old man's memories of those occasions on which the pleasures of Herne Hill were exchanged for the pleasures of the road, of the inn, of the post-chaise.

## FIRST QUARTER.

PARENTAGE—EARLY LIFE—FIRST BOOKS

(1819-43).

### CHAPTER II.

[1833-37.]

THE youth of John Ruskin was, as has been implied, a rather lonely one; perhaps if it had not been so he would have been less in communion with what we call inanimate Nature, but the Greeks called the Divine Mother; yet some friends he did have. To begin with, there resided "some six or seven gates down the hill, towards the field"—that is, some six or seven gates from the Ruskin family, a worthy couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Fall. Their son Richard was a year younger than John, but already at school at Shrewsbury, and therefore, as *Præterita* has it, "somewhat in advance (of him) in regular discipline, extremely gentle and good-natured; his sister, still younger, a clever little girl, her mother's constant companion; and both of them unpretending, but rigid examples of all Herne Hill proprieties, true religions, and useful learnings." The author of *Præterita* shudders still at "Mrs. Fall's raised eye-



brows, one day, at his pronunciation of 'naïvété' as 'naïvette.'" But he goes on to say that, in 1832, Mr. Ruskin, noticing with great respect the conduct of all matters in this family, wrote to Mr. Fall in courteous request that the two boys might be permitted, when Richard was at home, to pursue their holiday tasks or recreations, so far as it pleased them, together. The proposal was kindly taken; the two boys took stock of each other, agreed to the arrangement, and, as John had been promoted by that time to the possession of a study all to himself, while Richard had only his own room (and was liable to sisterly advice or intrusion), the course which things fell into was that usually, when Richard was at home, he came up past the seven gates about ten in the morning; did what lessons he had to do at the same table with John, occasionally helping him a little with his; and then they went together for an afternoon walk with Dash, Gipsy, or whatever dog chanced to be dominant.

Then there was Archibald Cockburn, the son of the best known of all Edinburgh wine-merchants, and often, like his father, a welcome guest at Herne Hill. Archibald was a fine type of the Kelt, a thorough sportsman and young laird, and full of romance; he was, therefore, much older than John Ruskin, but he took a fancy to the boy, and was delighted to pour into his alert ears many a long tale of Scotland, of wild Border or of purple Highlands, recounting innumerable days spent by him and his friends on the track of the stag, from the first start in the light of the purple dawn to the

return at eventide, underneath the robe of the ghostly mists, and recounting many a legend of the North lochs, lying fair and still in the hush of the summer moon.

These two friends each exercised a peculiarly different influence on John Ruskin; but the composite of the two influences was for good, although it is open to question whether any one's views or opinions ever sank very far into his inner soul. Other friends and acquaintances of the family there were, although the comings and goings with Croydon had become, through increasing difference in circumstances and tastes, fewer and fewer. But these appear to have been about the only comrades of the boy himself, the only young persons, indeed, if one excepts Mr. Dale's scholars, with whom he had intercourse outside his house.

There is very little else of outstanding matter for a biographer in these early years than the facts of this kind that come under his observation, and there are few of them; while the love-affairs with Mdlle. Domecq are not yet within the practical scheme of things. But Continental travel promises more, both to the writer and to the reader, and might be almost classed under education, as, indeed, the author of the *Stones of Venice* himself would have classed it. Besides, it fits in well to the narrative, the family making their Grand Tour in 1833, the year to which the last chapter had led us.

We had said that the present to the boy in 1832 by Mr. Telford, of Rogers' *Italy*, illustrated by Turner, brought fresh fuel to the young flame of

genius; indeed, that the gift produced a crisis in the life of the art-critic; and undoubtedly the beautiful engravings in the book excited in the whole happy trio at Herne Hill a desire for verification with their own eyes.

So then, in this golden year of 1833, they posted to Dover, crossed the Channel in the old packet-boat that Ruskin would have so much preferred to our new turbine steamers, arrived at Calais, of which he has in later times a good deal to recall, and passed on to Strasburg. Let us quote for a while from *Præterita*:—

“Here I note only our going up the Rhine to Strasburg, where, with all its miracles of building, I was already wise enough to feel the cathedral stiff and iron-worky; but was greatly excited and impressed by the high roofs and rich fronts of the wooden houses, in their sudden indication of nearness to Switzerland; and especially by finding the scene so admirably expressed by Prout in the thirty-sixth plate of his *Flanders and Germany*, still uninjured; and then with Salvador was held council in the inn-parlour of Strasburg, whether (it was then the Friday afternoon) we should push on to-morrow for our Sunday’s rest to Basle or to Schaffhausen. How much depended, if ever anything depends upon anything else, on the issue of that debate! Salvador inclined to the straight and level Rhine-side road, with the luxury of the Three Kings attainable at sunset. But at Basle, it had to be admitted, there were no Alps in sight, no cataracts within hearing, and Salvador honourably laid before us the splendid alternative possibility of reaching, by traverse of the hilly road of the Black Forest, the gates of Schaffhausen itself, before they closed for the night. The Black Forest, the fall of Schaffhausen, the chain of the Alps, within one’s grasp for Sunday! What a Sunday! instead of customary Walworth and the Dulwich fields! My impassioned petition at last carried it, and the earliest morning saw us trotting over the bridge of boats to Kehl, and in the eastern light I well remember watching the line

of the Black Forest hills enlarge and rise, as we crossed the plain of the Rhine. 'Gates of the hills,' opening for me to a new life—to cease no more, except at the Gates of the hills whence one returns not."

Just as Ruskin considered the gift of Mr. Telford to have been the origin of this journey, so he considers the journey itself to have been the origin of many of the greatest things in his long and useful career. The passage just quoted is a typical and noteworthy one, as showing what a place in the writer's mind the wild aspects of Nature always held, considered in relation to their power to stimulate or to repress fancies and thoughts, according to circumstances. This power, Ruskin would say, is the important thing about them, and, furthermore, about everything put before the eyes. When one destroys a piece of scenery, one destroys neither a mere mass of decoration nor one of wood and water, but millions of impressions, associations, memories, and visions, the key to which that piece of scenery was. He would insist, writing from the last stage of life, that what that early view of the Black Forest hills did for him, not only intellectually, but morally, so much may other views, which Liberal and progressive gentlemen are determined to efface, do for any number of people.

One Continental journey Ruskin had made before, but, as it was as a child of twelve, it need not be counted in his biography, either as an influence or as an important fact in itself. So far as the eye of the soul is concerned, Ruskin was now seeing Europe for the first time, and he loved her at first



sight and for always; he became a good European, as most of his countrymen are not, and instinctively felt that the reverent observation and interpretation of the wonders, divine and human, of the Continent was work enough, and noble work enough, for one lifetime, and should be his work.<sup>1</sup>

Again, it is improbable that John Ruskin, or his father, either, for that matter, being entirely intent upon the search for beauty, very largely, it must be confessed, in verifying Rogers, saw very much this time of the political misery of Italy. Indeed, upon the occasion of this visit to Milan, there was a slight lull in the gale that was about to blow away all foreign power whatsoever from the Peninsula. Therefore their travels were an unmixed pleasure, and they had little to do but admire the glories of the past, and store their minds against the coming of the dull seasons of the future. Mr. Ruskin seems to have had considerable skill as a draughtsman, and to have encouraged his son in the pursuit that had given so much joy to himself;<sup>2</sup> and it may be supposed that sketch-books were kept busy every day, and that the boy often attempted the impossible,

<sup>1</sup> All his life Ruskin continued to realize how great the other European nations really were; he did not attempt to patronize the countrymen of Goethe and Botticelli because he himself belonged to a nation whose navvies are highly fed, and which is the mother of Parliaments. He even imagined that to know what Botticelli meant, to be able to copy, lovingly, a single anemone from the meadow in his Spring, was better than to build the largest warships in the world.

<sup>2</sup> Some of Mr. Ruskin senior's work is extant, in the form of washdrawings, by all accounts.

yet not without some result; for it is only by attempting the impossible that one can do well in that which is possible.

But the autumn of this memorable year, 1833, finds the Ruskin family now, as has been seen, consisting of four persons, back in the old accustomed grooves at Herne Hill. John had to stop drawing cathedrals, as he loved to do, and to begin studying Greek Grammar, as he did not love to do. And a passage in *Præterita*, not entirely without humour, or indignation either, conveys his wrath against the Rev. Mr. Dale for a certain piece of unkindness in this very matter of Greek Grammar. Dr. Andrews had furnished John with Dr. Adams' Gradus; and Dr. Adams, who was the most famous of Scotch headmasters, and dominated the High School of Edinburgh before and after the time of the French Revolution, was a man to be revered. Of him it is said, by the way, that, when dying, he fancied he was dismissing school, and said, "It grows dark, boys; you may go." At all events it was the great pedagogue's Gradus that John bore proudly up to Mr. Dale's desk, like one presenting good credentials from a far country to a foreign monarch; whereupon Mr. Dale opened the book, looked at it, and pitched it scornfully down, saying, "Tut! a Scotch thing!" and insisted upon the immediate purchase of another. It was a galling experience; and the London master might, one thinks, have chosen some other revenge for Bannockburn. But, when one remembers how often the author of *Modern Painters* took occasion to tell mankind that their favourite pictures, by Raphael

perhaps, and their favourite dogmas, Mr. John Stuart Mill's perhaps, were, though not Scotch things, "vile things," one feels that Dr. Adams was avenged royally on a forgetful species!

Yet at Mr. Dale's John Ruskin remained for about two years, meeting there some boys whom we have not mentioned by name along with Richard Fall and Archibald Cockburn in the previous pages, because they became friends of his not so much during his (and their) school-days as in after years: these fellow-scholars were the two Matsons, sons of Colonel Matson, an officer of high position at Woolwich, and Edmund Oldfield, a lad of singular artistic inclinations.

During these two years John's cousin Mary was taking regular and patient lessons in drawing with Mr. Runciman, and far excelling her cousin, who took irregular and impatient ones, either from Mr. Runciman or from someone else; and Ruskin, perhaps as an aid to school-work, perhaps independently of it, fell into the hands of a Mr. Rowbotham for evening tuition in a few subjects, especially in mathematics. He gives some rather pathetic reminiscences of Mr. Rowbotham, who spent his spare time writing French and German grammars for almost nothing, and was constantly at a stay as to making ends meet, even with the assistance of his wife (who had too many children). Mrs. Ruskin, he says, used to have a hot and tempting tea waiting for Mr. Rowbotham on the appointed evenings, which, together with an interesting talk with the genial wine merchant, refreshed him exceedingly,

after his breathless and usually wet walk up Herne Hill.

1835 was a bright year, for the autumn of it saw the household, on whom the mania for travel had joyfully fallen, again across the "Silver Streak." Proceeding by Troyes and Dijon, they entered Switzerland by the Col de la Faucille. Those were the days when the mountain-ranges of Europe were yet unpierced by tunnels, such as the Mont Cenis, the St. Gothard, the Simplon, and untraversed by railways, funicular and otherwise, and their carriage had to ascend a height of between four thousand and five thousand feet before breaking the back of the Col; and the most readable thing in Ruskin's own account of the journeys of this year is the tale of this ascent and the stage immediately preceding it, with the summary of his way-side impressions. He says, among other things, that they went continually towards the hills, living upon French plums and bread, one of the happiest parties in the world. Of Geneva, their first destination in Switzerland, and their stay there on this occasion, he says little.

The next year, 1836, must be regarded as a year that must have given to the youth some exciting weeks; for in the summer of it authoritative word came from Mr. Walter Brown, the tutor of Christchurch, Oxford,<sup>1</sup> saying that Mr. Ruskin, if he wished his son to enter the College at the beginning of the Hilary term, must see that he was duly matriculated

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Ruskin had entered his son's name on the college books years before.



in the previous October. A summons of this kind means a great deal to a youth, especially to one that has never been to a public school. Even to one that has, it is no light matter; and every one who has read the last three chapters of *Tom Brown's School-days*—the third, by the way, is one of the finest things in literature—will remember how solemnly Tom and his young house-master talked of the former's farewell to school and approaching entry on university life, while Tom, as they sat in the late summer night, heard for the last time the footsteps die away in the Close, and saw for the last time the lights appearing in the doctor's house. But, as we say, to a youth that has never been to a public school a summons of this kind means an especially great deal: he is not acquainted with the ways of gregarious men; he is entering upon a classical tradition, not continuing it; he is to be playing in the drama of existence, not regarding it; he is creating a precedent for himself, not observing it. He sees from the London road a grey, somewhat low-lying city, expanding itself in the dusk at the time when leaves fall, and crowned with a coronet of spires; there a dome, yonder a glowing tower, every one of them shifting its position above the marshes, while the noise of bells approaches the travellers and mixes itself with the roll of their travel: the whole place, he conceives, must be alive under its shadows with a wonderful new life: great names stand out in the imagination like the objects of the city in the physical view, and as though to drown with their music the murmurs of home. Whom, says he, shall I meet

here, with what identify myself, how be treated for what I do and seem, and how compensated for what I leave? Thus he speaks, and enters the walls with joy mingled with fear, conscious even now of being at one of the epic moments of life: not till later will the idea occur to him that neither the moment, nor the life in which it was epic, is unique, and that the strangeness of things, as felt on such an autumn evening, is weighted with a subconsciousness of past existences, and somehow associated with conceptions of the life after death.

But all this metaphysics apart, it would be interesting to know what the thoughts of John Ruskin were as he drove with his father up the High Street and past University College and down a street to the left, ultimately stopping before the gate of Wolsey's honourable foundation. Formal interviews there would, of course, be, quite upsetting the appetite for the dinner prepared at the "Angel," not yet displaced by the "Mitre." Formal interviews, payment of moneys, and an afternoon free for the first study of so much glorious architecture and its accompanying history!

How the space intervening between the matriculation in October and the entry in the January following was spent; that is to say, whether it was spent in any special course of study, under Mr. Rowbotham's guidance or otherwise, we do not know. But a good deal of expectation of home-sickness there undoubtedly was, both in the mind of the new Oxonian and in the minds of his parents, to the extent that, as the appointed time drew near, it was

decided that rooms should be taken in the university city for Mrs. Ruskin so that she might be near her son—rooms in which her husband was to join her for the week-ends when possible.

The author of *Præterita* records, without much sentiment, his instalment in Peckwater Quad as a gentleman-commoner,<sup>1</sup> and his somewhat embarrassing reception by his comrades at the dinner-table; but it does not seem to occur to him that a freshman entering a college at the Hilary term is bound to excite more uncomfortable interest than one entering at the Michaelmas term, when there are sure to be a great many others in the same position as himself.

Ruskin's accounts of the college authorities are not without interest, though on the whole unfavourable to the aristocracy of learning and their pretensions. Of the Dean it is recorded that he conversed in grunts, like an animal; though under a harsh exterior and manner he hid the kindly heart which the world has agreed to attribute to rude people. The sub-dean (or was it the tutor?) looked more learned and important than he was, as Lord Bacon said of the Spaniards; and altogether the attitude of these great men towards undergraduates was largely that of certain of their successors—to wit, the pose of a dragon in front of the Tree of Knowledge, rather than that of a God leading the votaries of knowledge towards it.

Curiously enough, the home-bred boy, timid,

<sup>1</sup> Gentleman-commoner. A student receiving certain favours in view of high birth or of great wealth.

proud, and rather unsociable, had not been bullied or teased to any extent at Mr. Dale's school; and now the youth, retaining his early characteristics, in spite of a general desire to make himself pleasant to those with whom he would associate, was fairly well treated at Christchurch. The gentleman-commoner of those days had upon his initiation, or rather as his initiation to a noble and ancient society, to give a sumptuous supper; and Ruskin was able to give his supper in handsome fashion, especially as regards wines, and kept his head moderately clear at the end of it by pouring his toddy down his shirt-front, with the result that he was able to carry four of his guests downstairs, help the son of the Dean home, and get to his own room unassisted, though with a little difficulty.

Among those with whom he formed actual friendships at the University, Frederick Charteris, afterwards Lord Wemyss, takes a prominent place in his recollections. Charteris possessed great physical beauty, a thing that always attracted John Ruskin, was a keen sportsman, a man who did most things easily, and nothing badly, and altogether a most genial character. Then there was Henry Acland, a man considerably older than Ruskin, and who continued to be intimate with him in after years. At Exeter College an old acquaintance from Mr. Dale's was in residence, Henry Dart, who competed with Ruskin for the Newdigate Prize for English verse, and, indeed, won it the year after him. He seems to have been very intimate with the art-critic, and the loss to the latter was very great when his old



schoolfellow closed his bright eyes<sup>1</sup> for ever on the world somewhere about 1840.

"Alack, for Corydon no rival now!"<sup>2</sup>

And yet life is one long extirpation of rivalries, friendly and otherwise, so that the older one gets, the more one loses pleasant incentives to effort.

Again, we must not forget one who, from his exalted position, should have come first, good Canon Buckland, then one of the leading minds in Oxford, and, as regards the observation and collection of geological facts, apart from theories founded thereon, is still a name to conjure with. Canon Buckland resided in a corner of Peckwater Quad, along with his family, one of whom, Frank Buckland, is better known to the present generation than his distinguished father. Ruskin says that Canon Buckland asked him to visit him in this residence whenever he required advice or aid in his studies, and, what was better still, even at times requested the lad's assistance in the making of diagrams and drawings of scientific objects, a work for which the latter was pre-eminently fitted.

Finally, to relieve whatever monotony there may have been in the life of the university city, there came occasional invitations from the Matson family at Woolwich, the friendship, perhaps, being strengthened and renewed through Henry Dart—invitations that were joyfully accepted when the college

<sup>1</sup> This is meant as a rude quotation from *Præterita*. We are not sure of the exact words.

<sup>2</sup> "Thyrsis." (Matthew Arnold.)

authorities, seldom inexorable to gentlemen-commoners, permitted a week-end of absence. Colonel Matson himself appears to have been an almost exact counterpart of Colonel Newcome, while fulfilling Addison's ideal of the perfect gentleman. Indeed, Ruskin has often said that when denouncing war and those who engaged in it in later years, as he does in many of his works, the memory of Colonel Matson seemed to check him; for he felt it hard to understand how anything utterly vile and inexcusable could produce, or would permit, a life so wholly honourable and clean.

## FIRST QUARTER.

PARENTAGE—EARLY LIFE—FIRST BOOKS

(1819-43).

### CHAPTER III.

[1837-43.]

PERHAPS the first serious attempt on the part of John Ruskin at fulfilling his destiny was a poem entitled "The Universe," which he worked at in 1828, that is, at the age of nine. This unfinished epic, though imitative, yet showed a degree of maturity and an amount of intimacy with Nature altogether extraordinary: to match it, as a phenomenon of precocity, one would have to cite the achievements of Joseph Hoffman and of Von Vecsey in the realms of music. But as space confines us to that which is absolutely rather than precociously good, we need not stay to discuss this early labour, but take as the first-fruits of a great literary life a work begun during the long vacation of 1837, and accepted by *Loudon's Architectural Magazine* the same autumn, and appearing in the pages of that journal from November of the above year to the December of 1838. The alternative title of the series of articles is *The Architecture of*

*the Nations of Europe, considered in its Association with Natural Scenery and National Character.* Part I. takes as its heading, The Cottage; Part II., The Villa; while Parts III. and IV., dealing with The Castle, The Palace, and The City, have never been written, owing to the abrupt close to which the career of the magazine came. The articles did not see the light in book-form till 1873 in the United States of America, and 1893 in Great Britain, which looks as if the author did not occupy himself much regarding their fate and future. But, as a matter of fact, the book ought to be a most important one to all students of Ruskin, instead of being as much neglected as it is, because it forms the key to all his future writing on artistic subjects. The main thesis, in our own words, is:—That Architecture is not merely House-building, or even Artistic House-building, but far more than this; that it is the art of uniting the work of Man with the work of God as far as possible: the art of repression of individual fancies (except in moderation), and of building, not for the sake of absolute effect, but for the development, or (passively) for the uninterrupted, of an atmosphere of poetry, history, in some cases even religion.

The book is largely a book of negations, the edifices recommended by Ruskin seeming colourless and void of individuality. It is also an untechnical work written for technical men, and therefore very remarkable. Then, although the author professes himself a Tory, his work here clearly exhibits the germs of the Socialism of twenty years later; for example, we



are told that one who builds at all must build not to please himself, but the passers-by,—a recommendation assuming the existence of a strong artistic sense in the ordinary individual who walks in the road, a sensitiveness that is easily shocked by an outrageous building, and hinting that the ordinary owner of a villa does not possess this sensitiveness in so high a degree. Whereas, curiously, Ruskin everywhere else in his writings shows a belief that the being that stands for the “passer-by” is almost dead to beauty. The book is exceedingly eloquent in places, and contains, as might be expected, much that cannot be too often read and considered, such as the remarks on the desecration of Nature that proceeds in too many quarters. At the same time it forms, as has been said, a key to all the author’s future writing on artistic subjects, and it is a key to his weakness as well as to his strength. His strength is his entire zeal for what he believes to be right, illumined by a microscopic power of observation; his weakness is his blindness to the varied values held by various men of facts apparent to all; he thinks that these facts have only to be explained for everyone of his adversaries to agree with him; he would have it that Liberals and Conservatives really want the same things, if they only knew it. Ruskin’s error has been shared by many great souls, from Plato to Charles Kingsley; the real truth being, that men love different policies and hold by them, not entirely as the two knights swore by the sides of the shield, but rather as their peculiar palates enjoy wines that differ, after tasting them all.

But as this series of lectures, worked at by Ruskin in his spare time at Oxford, forms about the only subject of general interest in the nineteenth year of his life, we leave space for two sets of quotations, the one representative of the architectural teaching of the lectures, the other chosen for rhetorical beauty; the one is indicated by the letter (A), the other by the letter (B).

## A.

## "THE COTTAGE" (Page 56).

"The ease and irregularity is peculiarly delightful where gracefulness and freedom of outline and detail are, as they always are in mountain countries, the chief characteristics of every scene. It is well that where every plant is wild, and every torrent free, every field irregular in its form, every knoll various in its outline, one is not startled by well-built walls or unyielding roofs, but is permitted to trace in the stones of the peasant's dwelling, as in the crags of the mountain side, no evidence of the line or the mallet, but the operation of Eternal influences, the presence of an Almighty hand. Another perfection connected with its<sup>1</sup> ease of outline, its severity of character; there is no foppery about it; not the slightest effort of any kind at ornament, but what nature chooses to bestow; it wears all its decorations wildly, covering its nakedness, not with what the peasant may plant, but with what the winds may bring. There is no gay colour or neatness about it; no green shutters or other abomination; all is calm and quiet, and severe, as the mind of a philosopher, and withal a little sombre. It is evidently old, and has stood many trials in its day; and the snow, and the tempest, and the torrent have all spared it, and left it in its peace, with its grey head unbowed, and its early strength unbroken, even though the spirit of decay seems creeping, like the moss and the lichen, through the darkness of its crannies. This venerable and slightly melancholy character is the very soul of all its beauty.

*Par.* 56.—"There remains only one point to be noticed, its humility.

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<sup>1</sup> The Cottage's.

This was before stated to be desirable, and will be here found in perfection. The building draws as little attention upon itself as possible; since, with all the praise I have bestowed upon it, it possesses not one point of beauty in which it is not equalled or excelled by every stone at the side of the road. It is small in size, simple in form, subdued in tone, easily concealed or overshadowed; often actually so; and one is always delighted, and surprised to find that what courts attention so little is capable of sustaining it so well. Yet it has no appearance of weakness; it is stoutly, though rudely built; and one ceases to feel for its sake the violence of the surrounding agencies, which, it may be seen, will be partly deprecated by its humility.

*Page 131, par. 132.*—"We do not think there is any truth in the aphorism, now so frequently advanced in England, that the adaptation of shelter to the corporal comfort of the human race is the original and true end of the art of architecture, properly so called: for, were such the case, he would be the most distinguished architect who was best acquainted with the properties of cement, with the nature of stone, and the various durability of wood. That such knowledge is necessary to the perfect architect we do not deny; but it is no more the end and purpose of his application, than a knowledge of the alphabet is the object of the refined scholar, or of rhythm of the inspired poet.

*Page 85, par. 90.*—"Slated roofs are disagreeable, unless, as in the Westmoreland cottage, the grey roof is warmed with lichenous vegetation, when it will do well with anything; but thatch is better. If the building be not of wood, the walls may be built of anything which will give them a quiet and unobtrusive warmth of tone. White, if in shade, is sometimes allowable; but, if visible at any point more than two hundred yards off, it will spoil the whole landscape.

"THE VILLA" (Pages 169, 170, Par. 171).

"Every one has a right to hold himself up as a laughing-stock to the whole circle of his friends and acquaintances, and to consult his own private asinine comfort by any piece of absurdity which can in any degree contribute to the same; but no one has any right to exhibit his imbecilities at other people's expense. In England especially, where, as we saw before, the rage for attracting observa-

tion is universal, the outside of the villa is rendered, by the proprietor's own disposition, the property of those who daily pass by, and whom it hourly affects with pleasure or pain. . . . And therefore an individual has as little right to fulfil his own conceptions (170) by disgusting thousands, as, were his body as impenetrable to steel or poison as his brain to the effect of the beautiful or true, he would have to decorate his carriage roads with caltrops, or to line his plantations with upas trees."

## B.

## POETRY OF ARCHITECTURE.

"THE COTTAGE." (Page 21, Par. 25, *et seq.*)

"Every part of the landscape is in unison; the same glory of mourning is thrown over the whole; the deep blue of the heavens is mingled with that of the everlasting hills, or melted away into the silence of the sapphire sea; the pale cities, temple and tower, lie gleaming above the champaign; but how calmly! no hum of men; no multitude in the midst of them; they are voiceless as the city of ashes. The transparent air is gentle among the blossoms of the orange and the dim leaves of the olive; and the small fountains, which, in any other land, would spring merrily along, sparkling and singing among tinkling pebbles, here flow calmly and silently into some pale font of marble, all beautiful with life, worked by some unknown hand, long ago nerveless, and fall, and pass on among wan flowers, and scented copse, through cool, leaf-lighted caves, or grey Egerian grottoes, to join the Tiber or Eridanus, to swell the waves of Nemi or the Larian Lake. The most minute objects (leaf, flower, and stone), while they add to the beauty, seem to share in the sadness of the whole."

*Par. 26.*—"But, if one principal character of Italian landscape is melancholy, another is elevation. We have no simple rusticity of scene, no cowslip and buttercup humility of seclusion. Tall mulberry trees, with festoons of the luxuriant vine, purple with ponderous clusters, trailed and trellised between and over them, shade the wide fields of stately Indian corn; luxuriance of lofty vegetation (catalpa, and aloe, and olive), ranging itself in lines of massy light along the wan champaign, guides the eye away to the unfailing of



mountain, Alp or Appenine; no cold long range of shivery grey, but dazzling light of snow; nor undulating breadth of blue, fainter, and darker, in infinite variety; peak, precipice, and promontory passing away into the wooded hills, each with its tower or white village sloping into the plain; castellated battlements cresting their undulations; some wide, majestic river gliding along the campaign, the bridge on its breast, and the city on its shore; the whole canopied with cloudless azure, basking in mistless sunshine, breathing the silence of odoriferous air."

"THE VILLA" (Page 139, Par. 137).

"These lines of arches cast soft shadows along the bright fronts, and are otherwise of great value. Their effect is pretty well seen in Fig. 19 (a part of Petrarch's villa); a piece which, while it has no distinguished beauty, is yet pleasing by its entire simplicity; and peculiarly so, when we know that simplicity to have been chosen (some say built) for its last and lonely habitation, by a mind of softest passion as of purest thought; and to have sheltered its silent old age among the blue and quiet hills, till it passed away like a deep, lost melody from the earth, leaving a light of peace about the grey tomb at which the steps of those who pass by always falter, and around this deserted, and decaying, and calm habitation of the thoughts of the departed."

It is to be feared that while John Ruskin was writing all these fine pieces of English at Oxford, and in London, he was neglecting his proper studies—and perhaps it will appear to have been worth his while. But certainly he was never remarkable in any way at college, and consequently his sessions there are about the most arid period of his life to a biographer. So, like him, we wander from the university curriculum, and, having devoted so much space to the *Poetry of Architecture* (at the same time giving good reasons for so doing), record a little romance.

In writing of the tour made by the family in 1833, we omitted to say anything of the visit to Paris; but such a visit was made, with various consequences—one consequence being that Ruskin, going to the Louvre, and venturing to converse in his schoolboy French with several severe-looking gentlemen in a private room, was allowed to copy Rembrandt's "Supper of Emmaus," a feat which was well enough performed, and proved quite an inspiration to him for the future—but the other consequences much more serious. These other consequences included a visit to M. Domecq and a dinner at his house, where the seeds of great unhappiness were sown in the boy's mind. For though left to the mercies of the youngest daughter of the family, Elise, who was quite a child, he cast dumb eyes on one of her elder sisters, Clotilde Adèle, and all in vain. He came, saw, but did not conquer; and for five years, to a certainty, he was troubled in his soul by an impossible vision: probably even for more than five years, for there is a passage in his memoirs dealing with the spring of 1840, a passage overlooked by most people who have written upon his affairs of the heart, a passage which says, specially referring to the approaching marriage of Clotilde Adèle to a French nobleman, that things were going from bad to worse in Paris, progressing towards the final catastrophe. And the unique reticence of Ruskin on the subject of Adèle, after a certain point, says more than any speech.

The four Domecq girls had come to London in 1836, before he was summoned to Oxford to matricu-

late, and "reduced him to ashes in four days," the "Mercredi des Cendres" lasting some time longer—and after their departure he had tried to keep up a correspondence with the person of his choice, inditing long letters in most laborious French, which sufficed only to make her laugh, and dedicating to her a tragedy dealing with Venetian life. Finally, while Mr. and Mrs. Ruskin seem to have had no conception of any such love affair, doubtless considering it too preposterous, it is absolutely certain that the Mercredi des Cendres was not ended in any wise by the new career opening at Oxford the following winter. He must often have looked at the stars above Paris by night, and at the curve of the white road winding thither by day, with a brain full of memories and full of sorrow.

In 1838, the year in which he wasted so much time at the University in trying to trisect an angle, by his own account there was renewed an old intimacy between the Ruskin family and a family of the name of Withers, formerly resident at Herne Hill, and now living further away from the city. The parents on both sides encouraged a friendship between John, then at home for another vacation, and Miss Withers, a pretty girl of seventeen or so. And the usual opinion is that Miss Withers displaced Adèle in the young author's affections; but this is not really so. No doubt it made John Ruskin feel that Adèle was not the only attractive girl in the world; and he may have weighed the two beauties in imaginary scales in some confusion of heart. But there is little evidence that he had any deep feeling for the English

maiden,<sup>1</sup> while, as we have shown from his own statements, he regarded Adèle's marriage with another man as late as 1840 as a final catastrophe.

All through 1838, however, he had quite sufficient work on hand, what with his ordinary studies and the fine drawings, some of them delicately coloured after the manner of Prout, with which he was illustrating the *Poetry of Architecture*, to keep his love-sickness from leading him to any desperate measures or any morbid madness. Then came 1839, a year in which the most important happening to him, from his own point of view, was the acquisition by himself and his father of Turner's "Gosport," which straightway received a place of honour on the walls of his room at Oxford, and became a continual source of pleasure.

It was expected that he would, in the ordinary course of things, graduate in 1840, and as in some subjects he was very far from strong, there was called in to his assistance one of the most distinguished of the Fellows of Christchurch, Osborne Gordon, and the two read hard together during the Michaelmas term, and even the Christmas vacation.

<sup>1</sup> There was another English maiden in whose eyes John Ruskin found favour, and who found favour herself in the eyes of his parents. This was Miss Wardell, the daughter of very rich people at Hampstead. This was either in the same year that he got to know Miss Withers, or possibly a year later. But of this episode, also, too much has been made. John did not fall in love with Miss Wardell at all, the whole *rapprochement* being arranged by the two families, and the fair one herself: and in a very short time the unfortunate girl, over-educated and over-travelled, fell into a decline from which she never recovered, but died.



Like many men of conjoined scientific and æsthetic temperament, Ruskin was intensely open to every variety of impression from every quarter of the universe: he had all the scientist's keenness of observation at this time, together with the æsthete's difficulty in concentrating his attention upon what proved unpleasant. Whereas the labour done at our centres of learning does not encourage keenness of observation so much as a mechanical and abnormal memory, nor ingenuity and lightness of fancy so much as the extinction of both. But Osborne Gordon supplied the necessary authoritative stimulus, and got the very most out of his pupil.

All would therefore have been well had not one of the seemingly adverse Fates intervened. In the beginning of the Hilary term, or even sooner, Ruskin felt a severe irritation in the throat, and shortly afterwards commenced to cough up blood. The advice of several physicians was taken immediately, and the verdict pronounced him to be in the first stage of consumption. As those were the days before Koch, or the advocates of modern scientific treatments, it can be understood that the alarm in the Ruskin household was very great. Study, of course, was no longer to be spoken about, for a change to the Continent from the damp meadows of Oxford had to be made without any delay. So Ruskin obtained a somewhat unwilling permission from the Dean to defer his candidature for a degree to another year, said good-bye to his coach and his tutors, and sat down with his father to the map of Europe.

At last, their plans being duly made, the family set out for Italy, and, in spite of the shadow hanging over them, obtained considerable enjoyment by the way. They visited Blois, sacred with memories of the Maid of Orleans; Amboise, where the perfumes of Mary Stuart seem to linger still; and Tours, where the history of France grows immemorial, and Life pauses like a summer shadow. The Chateau de Chambord they may have seen, with its hundred staircases, set, like a house from the Earthly Paradise, in the midst of a forest that is yet enchanted, down whose glades the Chasseur Noir is still believed to ride at midnight. They passed Le Puy and Papal Avignon, and took to the coast of the Riviera, entered Albenga, Savona, Ventimiglia, and Lucca in due succession, and found themselves at Florence. The Duomo, with its massive marbles, impressed John, as it does most thinking people, but he appears to have made no attempt to draw it, probably feeling less confidence in his own skill and more desire to study the work of others than heretofore.

Then came the entry into Rome; but anyone who expects to find the occasion improved in Ruskin's memoirs, by a burst of the usual eloquence of tourists, or, indeed, in anything but the very quietest terms, will be disappointed. But the Eternal City, or rather the charm of it, grew upon the fastidious student the longer his residence lasted, the more so as he found that he would not be obliged to study art in silence, without people of his own nationality sharing in his love and understanding of the beautiful, to sympathize and argue with him. He had intro-

ductions from Henry Acland to Mr. Severn, the well-known friend of Shelley, and also to Mr. Severn's own companion, Mr. Richmond, and consequently had access, if he desired it, to the best and most interesting Roman society of that day. And he did desire it; and he and his father obtained a vast deal of pleasure from those introductions, while Mrs. Ruskin acted as guardian to her niece on the sketching expeditions of the latter.

It is doubtful whether John had at this time made any entry upon the actual text of his *Modern Painters*, but he was already a passionate disciple of Turner, and a scourge to many of the old masters and those who sat at their feet because it was the correct place to sit. He had condemned the Uffizi Gallery and all that was therein at Florence, and now he said that the Roman Forum was rather a poor affair, only put up with the Stanzi because Sir Joshua Reynolds had praised them, and told everybody he met that Raphael's "Transfiguration" was an ugly picture, and Domenichino's "St. John" a bad one.

The family proceeded south to Naples, where they saw a good deal of the horrors of political misgovernment which were destined to bring down the eloquent wrath of Mr. Gladstone in later years. They spent some time at Capua, and then returned to Rome. April or May saw them at Bologna, and here John, whose health was better than it had been farther south, got under way with the composition of his *magnum opus*, writing a good deal of Part I. of *Modern Painters*, it is probable, and making some minute drawings and notes of "light effects,"

it is certain. By the middle of June they were as far north in France as Fontainebleau, where a moderately long stay appears to have been made, and an immense deal learned of the real marvels of Nature, even in her smallest forms. It was, indeed, here that John first realized, or seemed to realize, while lying in the forest, that if he could draw a fallen leaf perfectly he could draw anything at all.

It will now suffice to say that the tour had had its desired effect, and that the end of autumn found the hæmorrhage altogether gone, and its former victim able to do a good deal of necessary reading and some unnecessary, besides collecting of engravings and water-colours,—and so have done with the year.

The record of the next, 1841, may begin with the month of May, in which Ruskin took a double-fourth at Oxford, his weakness in classics being excused in virtue of his strength in Holy Scripture and in mathematical subjects. He had, of course, to keep the summer term in an easy-going way, spending his time mostly in arguing about Art with Acland, Dale, and other companions, and making diagrams for Dr. Buckland. Then he started on a long-desired expedition to Snowdon with Richard Fall, deciding, at his father's wish, to stop at Leamington on his way and present himself before the celebrated Dr. Jephson and consult him with regard to a certain indisposition. Dr. Jephson said that if he would only stay and take the waters for six weeks under his supervision the indisposition would vanish. But Ruskin objected to this, and pushed on towards his first destination, only to be stopped at a town on



the Welsh border by an urgent command from his father to go back and obey the great physician's advice. So, leaving Richard Fall to go on alone, he returned south, and went into quiet lodgings not far from the Leamington pump-room. The simple way of life enforced upon him here proved to be beneficial in the extreme, and after a visit to his old tutor, Mr. Walter Brown, newly presented to the living of Wendlebury, in Oxfordshire, he found himself once more at Herne Hill in the best of health and spirits, and spent the later months of the year in literary work, at the same time seeing a good deal of very distinguished society—indeed, among other people the poet Rogers and J. M. W. Turner, who little realized what a champion and interpreter he was destined to have in the author of the *Poetry of Architecture*.

Much of 1842 went in travel to Ruskin's beloved Switzerland in search of copy, a good deal of time being spent at Chamounix in studying the different aspects of Mont Blanc, and some more elysian days at Fontainebleau. But there is no need to give the details of this tour, as it would be mere repetition both to writer and reader. Some formal term-keeping there may have been at Oxford, but we are inclined to think that this was put off till the following year, the year that was to offer the surprise to mankind of a youth with little experience, but an infinite and far-reaching talent, attacking the opinions of which they had made gods—yes, and conquering them!

## SECOND QUARTER.

ARTISTIC LITERATURE AND CRITICISM

(1843-60).

### CHAPTER IV.

“MODERN PAINTERS.”

THE Ruskin family had removed during the last months of the year 1842 from the house on Herne Hill to one on Denmark Hill. The reason for this change was not merely the increasing wealth of the wine-merchant, but the entry of his son into the academic and literary worlds, an entry which the *Poetry of Architecture* had begun, the articles in *Blackwood's Magazine* in defence of Turner forwarded, and the issue of *Modern Painters* would make a triumph.

Mr. Ruskin, senior, convinced of the approaching greatness of John, determined to keep up a style more in keeping with that greatness; to open, in fact, a kind of *salon*, as they say in France, in which the young art critic and the now venerable J. M. W. Turner would be the principal lights. And this determination was to be justified almost immediately.

In May 1843, the first volume of *Modern Painters* appeared, and the exact date is as well worth finding

out and remembering as that of the appearance of the *Contrat Social*, the *Wealth of Nations*, the *Origin of Species*, *Sartor Resartus*, the *Analogy of Christianity*, the first Oxford Tract, or any of the great works that have established<sup>1</sup> or destroyed a philosophy or a system.

It is now very hard for us to realize what the conditions were under which *Modern Painters*, as a living masterpiece, challenged the criticism of the world, or what a revolution it has effected in some all-important planes of thought and labour. Possibly, indeed, we are already being overpowered by a reaction, such as that which threatens the bulwarks reared by men so different as Adam Smith and John Henry Newman: possibly Whistler and Corot are to be our guides in the realms of art, rather than Ruskin and Holman Hunt. But it will help us, if we can only get hold of some of the illustrated books of travel, some of the catalogues with critical notes, some of the drawing-school manuals, some of the illustrated periodicals, some of the engravings hung on walls, some of the plaster statues erected in public places, that were common before 1843. So far as these enable us to judge, the whole taste of the day was very far from being true to nature, as commonly defined, and did not run in the direction of accuracy, either in history, or in geology, or in anatomy, or in botany; and, whereas the defence made in favour of popular old masters and popular new ones alike was that they used their imaginations to interpret nature, it is easily seen that they either did not do

<sup>1</sup> The words are used with a reservation.

anything of the sort, or else made their interpretations libellous. Claude's composition, "A Scene in the Campagna," in which a number of bulls and sheep are being driven by a mediæval shepherd into the water of a brook, while a fairly modern picnic party with bag-pipers is being charged (for no apparent cause) by a body of ancient Roman soldiers careering past the side of a water-mill which has no connection with the river on which it stands—Claude's composition may serve for an example of what among the "classics" was gazed at in our galleries with reverent admiration at that time. For examples of equally bad and far worse art among the moderns we only need to visit any old, permanent, and private collection.

In our own day we do not lack those who profess to admire pictures of Dutch coal-cellars, and of Italian saints whose legs do not support their bodies; but in 1843 there was no one else on hanging committees. Classicalism had run mad, being only tempered, and that for the worse, by the animalism of the Flemish schools; and though the age when men depicted the Magi in tail-coats worshipping the Infant was over for ever, yet there was still a widespread falseness in taste and ideals that threatened to ruin, by its association, both imaginary and historical painting, and by its neglect, landscape painting. By its neglect, landscape painting, and the statement is true; for since it is easy to infuse a living and grotesque sentiment into a group of figures or into the portrait of an eminent alderman, but not easy to infuse it into the view of a landscape,



few ambitious artists would waste their time upon wild nature, and still fewer, even if they were willing to waste their time, could keep their Roman soldiers and mediæval shepherds off the scene. Nevertheless, the rules laid down by authorities for the composition and portrayal of landscapes were numerous and complicated in the extreme. One was told where to put one's brown<sup>1</sup> tree and where one's ruined castle, where one's flock of goats and where one's temple grove, while tradition was the all-important thing, and men had to ask, not so much what were the characteristics of rocks, flowers, and rivers as they occurred in the wilds, as what were their characteristics in the pictures of Cuyp and Poussin. In fact, the condition of art, especially British art, in the early part of the nineteenth century, appears to have been very much like the condition of the Jewish religion in the time of Christ. And into this ponderous, affected, and false atmosphere *Modern Painters* came like a bomb-shell, and with the most tremendous result possible: all sorts of learned rubbish and extinct formulæ, every variety of theatrical creation and its annotatory solemn and impressive fudge, went down like packs of cards amid vain shrieks of indignation from all interested parties. Imagine the confusion of the frogs when the snake came into their midst; imagine the relief of the crowd in the fairy tale of Hans

<sup>1</sup> Claude is not singled out here because he is excessively bad, for he is no mean painter, but as one of the best and least offensive of the school condemned by Ruskin. "If Claude is wrong," says the critic, "what are his imitators?"

Andersen, when a little voice dared to say that the naked king had got nothing on; imagine the most striking disillusionment that you can, and you will conceive the state of affairs.

The controversy, of course, was tremendous, although the fact that Ruskin had the right end of the stick is more than evidenced by this alone—namely, that of all the attempted refutations of *Modern Painters* that were written at the time practically none have survived. But meanwhile he had to face on the one hand a storm of abuse from the advocates and servants of classical tradition, and on the other a coldness and discouragement from the very modern painters whom he supported, the latter thinking that his support would be their ruin, given, as it was, to what they had been led to believe blemishes, rather than virtues, in themselves. The essay in defence of J. M. W. Turner<sup>1</sup> in *Blackwood's Magazine* had been the germ of the book, and is, of course, part of it; and, indeed, in the Preface to the first edition Ruskin says that he is not sure whether to announce his work as a large essay on landscape-painting in general, and apologize for its constant reference to the creations of a particular master (Turner), or to announce it as a large essay on the creations of a particular master,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is understood to refer specially to landscape-painting.

<sup>2</sup> Ruskin had meant to call his book, "Turner and the Ancients," but changed it to "Modern Painters; their superiority in the Art of Landscape Painting to all the Ancient Masters proved by Examples of the True, the Beautiful, and the Intellectual, from the works of Modern Artists, especially from those of J. M. W. Turner, Esq., R.A."

and apologize for its constant reference to landscape-painting in general. And, without doubt, the worst faults in *Modern Painters* are its deification of an individual, and determination to use the results produced by him as a standard quite as Procrustean, though not as vicious, as any that had been afore-time. Though, of course, it has to be remembered that only a system can destroy a system; mere negation never did succeed yet.

The many eccentricities of the pre-Raphaelite school that were yet to amuse a critical world, and for which Ruskin was largely, and in an indirect manner, to blame, are pardonable when regarded in the light shed by this truth.

But, to keep to our subject, it may be said that it is better to be attacked than ignored, and that accordingly the greater the troubling of the pool the better the young author was pleased. As for John James Ruskin, he affected a certain amount of displeasure and a Philistine dislike of notoriety, and may indeed have suffered somewhat in his own private convictions regarding Fine Art, but not only showed himself, at the same time, ready to take whatever social advantage accrued from his relation to the new champion, but also did something in the way of reciprocity, by bringing the whole household more into line with that society in which a rising literary man would feel most at home. Indeed, never at any time was the maxim of Mr. W. E. H. Lecky, that the family, not the individual, is the unit of the nation, more peacefully acted upon than in the case of the little circle of the wine-merchant at

Denmark Hill. Ruskin himself never would rise alone, if he could avoid it, from the ranks of the upper middle class, while the father, on his part, wisely made up his mind that all should rise together. Yet there is a notable passage in *Fors Clavigera*, in which the author insists that he and his parents were never so happy in Denmark Hill as in Herne Hill; the house in Herne Hill, he says, was big enough for his father and big enough for him, and so proceeds to lecture everybody on the simple life, and its desirability.

Meanwhile many of the best drawing-rooms were thrown open to the new iconoclast, the world being invariably found to lick the hand that torments it, for some reason or other, probably piquancy. Lady Davy, the widow of the famous Sir Humphry Davy, gave him some valuable introductions (so far as an inarticulate incantation can be valuable), and it was at one of her celebrated receptions that he afterwards made the acquaintance of Mr. Gladstone, an acquaintance that was to be ephemeral as the snow-flake.

But the whole of the year 1843 must have formed a delightful period in Ruskin's life: he must have been in a sort of elysium. The labour which he had gone through had been terrific, especially for such a young and delicate man; he had completed some eighteen hundred pages of manuscript, a heavy task even for a copyist; he had contrived to do the work at white heat, tempered by an immense research, and sustained a tide of eloquence so magnificent as to be unparalleled outside of Hooker and Chateaubriand: finally, he had managed to give the book dramatic unity, a thing impossible to him as he



became older. And now he felt, and with justice, that he might rest on his oars, without blame or care, at least so far as his own inclinations and inspirations would permit him. He bought pictures and engravings, and enjoyed them; he went to hear good concerts; he went to see great actors; he went to meet pleasant people. One of his "crowning mercies" was the gift to him by his indulgent father of Turner's "Slaver," a picture that is most admirably described in the Third Chapter of the Fifth Section of *Modern Painters*.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot forbear to insert the following long quotations, passages in which the writer shows how far short of Nature the conventional school have fallen:—

"Stand upon the peak of some isolated mountain at daybreak, when the night-mists first rise from off the plains, and watch their white and lake-like fields as they float in level bays and winding gulfs about the islanded summits of the lower hills, untouched yet by more than dawn, colder and more quiet than a windless sea under the moon of midnight; watch when the first sunbeam is sent upon the silver channels, how the foam of their undulating surface parts and passes away; and down under their depths the glittering city and green pasture lie like Atlantis, between the white paths of winding rivers; the flakes of light falling every moment faster and broader among the starry spires, as the wreathed surges break and vanish above them, and the confused crests and ridges of the dark hills shorten their gray shadows upon the plain. Has Claude given this?

"Wait a little longer and you shall see those scattered mists rallying in the ravines, and floating up towards you, along the winding valleys, till they couch in quiet masses, iridescent with the morning light upon the broad breasts of the higher hills, whose leagues of massy undulation will melt back and back into that robe

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<sup>1</sup> Vol. I.

of material light, until they fade away, lost in its lustre, to appear again above in the serene heaven, like a wild, bright, impossible dream, foundationless and inaccessible, their very bases vanishing in the unsubstantial and mocking blue of the deep lake below. Has Claude given this?

“Wait yet a little longer, and you shall see those mists gather themselves into white towers, and stand like fortresses along the promontories, massy and motionless, only piled with every instant higher and higher into the sky and casting longer shadows athwart the rocks; and out of the pale blue of the horizon you will see forming and advancing a troop of narrow, dark, pointed vapours, which will cover the sky, inch by inch, with their gray network, and take the light off the landscape with an eclipse which will stop the singing of the birds and the motion of the leaves together; and then you will see horizontal bars of black shadow forming under them, and lurid wreaths create themselves, you know not how, along the shoulders of the hills; you never see them form, but when you look back to a place which was clear an instant ago, there is a cloud on it, hanging by the precipices, as a hawk pauses over his prey. Has Claude given this?

“And then you will hear the sudden rush of the awakened wind, and you will see those watch-towers of vapour swept away from their foundations, and waving curtains of opaque rain let down to the valleys, swinging from the burdened clouds in black, bending fringes, or pacing the pale columns along the lake level, grazing its surface into foam as they go. And then, as the sun sinks, you shall see the storm drift for an instant from off the hills, leaving their broad sides smoking, and loaded yet with snow-white, torn, steaming rags of capricious vapour, now gone, now gathered again; while the smouldering sun, seeming not far away, but burning like a red-hot ball beside you, and as if you could reach it, plunges through the rushing wind and rolling cloud with headlong fall, as if it meant to rise no more, dyeing all the air about it with blood. Has Claude given this?

“And then you shall hear the fainting tempest die in the hollow of the night, and you shall see a green halo kindling on the summit of the eastern hills, brighter—brighter yet, till the large white circle of the slow moon is lifted up among the barred clouds, step by step, line by line; star after star she quenches with her kindling light,

setting in their stead an army of pale, penetrable fleecy wreaths in the heaven, to give light upon the earth, which move together, hand in hand, company by company, troop by troop, so measured in their unity of motion that the whole heaven seems to roll with them, and the earth to reel under them. Ask Claude, or his brethen, for that.

“And then wait yet for an hour, until the east again becomes purple, and the heaving mountains, rolling against it in darkness, like waves of a wild sea, are drowned one by one in the glory of its burning; watch the white glaciers blaze in their winding paths about the mountains, like mighty serpents with scales of fire; watch the columnar peaks of solitary snow, kindling downwards, chasm by chasm, each in itself a new morning; their long avalanches cast down in keen streams brighter than the lightning, sending each his tribute of driven snow, like altar-smoke, up to the heaven; the rose-light of their silent domes flushing that heaven about them and above them, piercing with purer light through its purple lines of lifted cloud, casting a new glory on every wreath as it passes by, until the whole heaven—one scarlet canopy—is interwoven with a roof of waving flame, and tossing, vault behind vault, as with the drifted wings of many companies of angels; and then, when you can look no more for gladness, and when you are bowed down with fear and love of the Maker and Doer of this, tell me who has best delivered this his message unto men!”

The above is from one of the last volumes of *Modern Painters*; the following is from the first:—

“If, in our moments of utter idleness and insipidity, we turn to the sky as a last resource, which of its phenomena do we speak of? One says it has been wet, and another it has been windy, and another it has been warm. Who, among the whole chattering crowd, can tell me of the forms and precipices of the chain of tall white mountains that gilded the horizon at noon yesterday? Who saw the narrow sunbeam that came out of the south, and smote upon their summits, until they melted and mouldered away in a dust of blue rain? Who saw the dance of the dead clouds, when the sunlight left them last night, and the west wind blew them before it, like withered leaves?

"All has passed unregretted or unseen ; or, if the apathy be ever shaken off, even for an instant, it is only by what is gross, or what is extraordinary ; and yet it is not in the broad and fierce manifestations of the elemental energies, not in the clash of the hail, nor the drift of the whirlwind, that the highest characters of the sublime are developed. God is not in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the still small voice. They are but the blunt and the low faculties of our nature, which can only be addressed through lamp-black and lightning.

"It is in the quiet and subdued passages of unobtrusive majesty ; the deep, and the calm, and the perpetual ; that which must be sought ere it is seen, and loved ere it is understood ; things which the angels work out for us daily, and yet vary eternally, which are never wanting, and never repeated ; which are to be found always, yet each found but once ;—it is through these that the lesson of devotion is chiefly taught, and the blessing of beauty given."

In May 1844 this well-earned holiday came to an end, or perhaps it should rather be said, changed its form. The whole family set off in the most luxurious style for Switzerland, and came to a halt at Chamounix. The best of the registered guides was engaged, Couttet, a man who appears to have been what we should call in Scotland a "character." Yet neither the father nor the son appears to have ventured upon any real mountain climbing, although Ruskin speaks of having been as high up as five or six thousand feet during his observations of *aiguilles*.<sup>1</sup> But in those days Alpine exploits were more modest than they are now, and the ascent of any of the great peaks, not to speak of Mont Blanc (all the conquests of which were recorded in a very small album), was a serious matter. However, an immense number of mountain studies and cloud studies

<sup>1</sup> Rock needles.



were completed on this tour—far more, as *Præterita* has it, than the observer could ever record, or ever use ; indeed, that is one of the old complaints of the man of genius, that he does not know how he is ever to communicate what he perceives. And not only the visible Universe, but Life itself, must have seemed boundless to Ruskin in those days. He must have had a vista before him of many futures, as a drowning man in the popular estimate has one of a single, mis-spent past.

Here he was, feeding the young flame of inspiration in the land of William Tell and of Manfred ; indeed, with all his powers of quiet and persistent observation, he could never have borne to live in a country devoid of historical or of legendary romance, however full of natural wonders that country might have been. But, once granted this historical or this legendary romance, he would condescend to an interest in everything else, from the small fauna of the region down to the progress of sanitation.

One thing only perplexes us in regard to this and other Swiss tours in Switzerland, and that is how Ruskin could spend so much time and labour in the investigation of the great facts of geology and mineralogy as he did spend without changing his views to some extent upon the great subject of the creation of the world and the antiquity of man. Of course this visit of 1844 anteceded the revelation contained in the *Origin of Species* by some fifteen years. But, nevertheless, it must have given opportunities for the commencement of an accumulation

of scientific knowledge to be continued during the constant returns that Ruskin made to Central Europe, and should have paved the way for the acceptance of new light and the repudiation of a great deal that is false in theology. Yet we find, as time goes on, that the only attitude of the great writer of the *Stones of Venice*, the close observer who produced the *Ethics of the Dust*, to men like Tyndall,<sup>1</sup> Huxley, Romanes, Sir Charles Lyell,<sup>2</sup> Darwin, and Wallace, is one of positive abuse. The great truths of Paleontology and of Evolution are not more capable of disposal by the joke in *Fors Clavigera*, which warns working men that they are no longer sons of Adam, but of sea-slime, than by Carlyle's jeer about the monkey damnification of mankind.

It is, of course, well known that Ruskin's views on religion veered round from Calvinistic evangelicism to a peculiar system of belief, which can scarcely be defined, but which laid peculiar stress upon works, as contrasted with the mere acceptance of a creed.<sup>3</sup> But his attitude to the general trend of

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin's animus against Tyndall did not arise so much from any carefully reasoned position, as from his own intimacy with Professor Forbes, the great antagonist of Tyndall. It was on this visit to Chamounix that Ruskin met Forbes, and, led by personal liking, became one of his disciples.

<sup>2</sup> Lyell is the only one of the above with regard to whom we would modify the statement in the sentence.

<sup>3</sup> Ruskin could not help seeing, as time advanced, that belief, in the ordinary sense of the term, is not in itself a moral act of mind; similarly, that unbelief is not necessarily an immoral one, or even an immoral negative state. The Calvinist school are apt constantly to confuse the belief with the moral results that spring from it.

scientific thought in the nineteenth century never changed. And this, as we say, considering the amount of his acquaintance with rocks and strata, is the remarkable thing about him. His attacks on scientists were not even as creditable as Mr. Gladstone's articles in a great review;<sup>1</sup> and yet he had opportunities for the acquisition of the special knowledge required that Mr. Gladstone never had; in fact, those who study the Huxley-Argyll-Gladstone controversy will trace a certain resemblance between the Duke of Argyll and Ruskin, as both of them were philosophers capable of letting scientific enlightenment pass through them as through a sieve, without producing a single reasonable deduction.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Ruskin showed himself no mean field geologist and a most painstaking collector of crystals during these months, and proceeded to form the nucleus of the splendid crystallographical museum that was to become to him such a source of pleasure in his last years at Coniston.

As for the drawings made at Chamounix, chiefly of aiguilles, glaciers, and exposed strata, they exhibit the most wonderful accuracy of line and wealth of detail; and one is led to the reflection, that had

<sup>1</sup> *The Nineteenth Century*. Mr. Gladstone's articles were collected into a book called the *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*.

<sup>2</sup> The men who do most harm to science may be divided into two main classes. Firstly, those who indulge in speculations and theories after an imperfect course of observation. Secondly, those who have a keen eye for facts, but see no meaning in them at all. We will not name any living example of the first class; but Lord Monboddo was once cited as an extreme one.

misfortune overtaken the Ruskin family, the draughtsman might easily have supported himself and them by the illustration of books of travel and of geological handbooks.

After many weeks at Chamounix, Ruskin visited the Italian lakes and the glorious Pass of the Simplon, of the completion of whose tunnel the master would be disgusted to hear, if he were alive. Zermatt and the Matterhorn he had seen and condemned, as was his manner, or, at least, compared very unfavourably with something else.

The family had, we think, separated from him on this tour for some little time, not being interested in glaciers and aiguilles to the same extent. But it was as a collected party that they returned home by the Col de Faucille, Montelimart, and Paris. Paris seems never to have regained its popularity with Ruskin after the affair with Adèle Domecq, so strong was his power of associating neutral scenes with human sentiments; yet he spent some very instructive days in the Louvre, and had some of his most treasured convictions sadly upset by an intense study of the pictures by Titian and Veronese within its walls; he began to think that he had done some of the old masters an injustice, as, indeed, he had; and he modified some of the writing in the new volumes of *Modern Painters* accordingly, although wise enough to feel that the good influence which he was exercising upon the world of Art in general more than counterbalanced any wrong committed against individuals whose position is impregnable.



This brings us to the end of July 1844, or possibly, a little way past it. The remainder of the year may be regarded as uneventful, like so many periods in the life<sup>1</sup> of a man of letters, or of any man whose days are occupied with words and ideas, and not with actual deeds.

Yet the time was well spent, not in writing, or even in studying works of art, so much as in gaining an acquaintance with the literature of the subject in hand. The young author was busying himself in finding out what other people, especially other people in earlier ages of the world, had said before him, and absorbing mental food, as a change from providing it. And what he read appears among other things to have convinced him of the fact, that while he had appreciated the Gothic wonders of France and the Alpine splendours of Switzerland, he had not profited sufficiently by his sojourn among the Latin glories of Italy. Accordingly, he felt that he could not proceed with *Modern Painters* without further travelling: and he spent the early part of the spring of 1845 in making the necessary plans and preparations for yet another tour, which was to include Pisa and Florence.

The revolutionary spirit which was abroad in Europe had brought Switzerland to the verge of civil war during this winter, and everyone advised Ruskin not to take the Swiss route on this occasion: even Turner came out of his usual silence to add his voice to the chorus; but it was all to no purpose, for

<sup>1</sup> It is a well-established fact that the life of a great soldier is easier to write than that of a great poet or a great painter.

Ruskin had determined to set out in April, and kept to his determination.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The following letter shows that the Ruskins were by now pretty intimate with Turner. We do not know whether it was written to the father or to the son:—

47 QUEEN ANNE (no street) WEST,

*Thursday, 27th Feb. (1845).*

MY DEAR SIR,—Have the goodness to offer my respectful thanks to Mrs. Ruskin for the kind present of a part of the little fat friends and its——<sup>1</sup> Portugal onions for stuffing them included, etc., etc. Hoping you are all well.

Believe me, most truly obliged,

J. M. W. TURNER.

J. RUSKIN, Esq.

*P.S.*—In the *Times*, sad news from Switzerland.

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<sup>1</sup> Turner always indicates by these long lines the places in his letters where his feelings become inexpressible.

## SECOND QUARTER.

ARTISTIC LITERATURE AND CRITICISM.

(1843-60).

### CHAPTER V.

RUSKIN took with him a youth who had been his scout at Oxford, George by name, and travelled straight to the South of Switzerland, where he was joined by Couttet, the guide, now, we think, on the retired list. The trio proceeded straight to North Italy, and made long stays at Pisa and Florence. Couttet seems to have perceived what more cultivated people had overlooked—namely, that Ruskin's life was in danger of becoming the "absorbing, overgrown life of the intellect."<sup>1</sup> "Poor child," said he, "he does not know how to live."

It was at Faïdo and Dazio Grande that much of the last portion of the second volume and most of the first half of the third volume of *Modern Painters* was completed, the author meanwhile sending his two dependents out to make daguerrotypes for him.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Humphry Ward.

At Baveno they were joined by the painter Harding,<sup>1</sup> with whom Ruskin seems to have had some previous acquaintance in London, and went on to Lakes Como and Maggiore, and then back to Verona.

At Verona a most delightful and fruitful time was spent by the two companions; and then, ostensibly for the sake of Harding, a visit was paid to Venice. Ruskin had not been anxious to go to Venice at all, but once he got there, nothing but an attack of malarial fever could and did drive him away. The two companions chartered a gondola, and sat in it

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Painters*, p. 108. "Of the extended knowledge and various powers of this painter, frequent instances will be found in the following pages. Neither, perhaps, are rightly estimated among artists, owing to a certain coldness of sentiment in his choice of subject, and a continual preference of the picturesque to the impressive; proved, perhaps, in nothing so distinctly as in the little interest usually attached to his skies, which, if aerial, and expressive of space and movement, content him, though destitute of story, power, or character; an exception must be made in favour of the very grand sunrise on the Swiss Alps, exhibited in 1844,<sup>1</sup> wherein the artist's real power was in some measure displayed, though I am convinced he is still capable of doing far greater things. So also in his foliage he is apt to sacrifice the dignity of his trees to their wildness, and lose the forest in the copse; neither is he at all accurate enough in his expression of species or realization of near portions. These are deficiencies, be it observed, of sentiment, not of perception, as there are few who equal him in rapidity of seizure of material truth."

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<sup>1</sup> The date, 1844, shows that this is one of the pieces inserted in *Modern Painters* in the second edition. Ruskin was constantly bringing his works up to date; and not only up to date in matters of this kind, but in regard to his own mental and religious progress. This is what makes criticism of him so difficult; he is constantly cutting the ground from beneath his own feet and yours.



almost from sunrise to sunset for a whole week, studying boats and sails,<sup>1</sup> their colours in the sun, and their glorious reflections in different kinds of water.

Then Ruskin insisted, for some reason or other, on going into the Scuola di San Rocco—although Harding and everybody else told him that there was little to be learned or done there—and justified himself by finding a perfect mine of information and inspiration within its walls. *Præterita* describes the essay and its results exceedingly well, it may be said. Few things could tear Ruskin away from the Scuola as long as he remained in Venice at all, and he compelled everybody of his acquaintance to linger in the place along with him. Mr. Boxall, R.A., and a Mrs. Jameson, who seems to have been a very charming woman, arrived in the city, and joined themselves frequently to Harding and himself. Mrs. Jameson managed occasionally to wean him away from his lonely haunt, and accompany the others to the Rialto and out on the Grand Canal, where he argued with great vehemence on such questions as whether the reflection of a coloured buoy should be drawn vertically or obliquely against the slope of the wave on whose crest the buoy had risen. Meanwhile, as he lay in his bed, under his mosquito

<sup>1</sup> The Venetian fishermen appear to form a distinct class by themselves, like those of Newhaven, and, furthermore, to have guilds, like the mediæval workmen. Now the sails of their boats are blazoned or embroidered, in certain cases, with the insignia of the guilds or of the city (*Cf.* Turner's "*Sun of Venice Going to Sea*"), and form a very beautiful spectacle.

curtains at night, his active brain planned a very great book, whose title was to be *The Stones of Venice*.

We had said that it was fever that drove Ruskin away from Venice; and not only is this the case, but the malarial dregs remained in his system for some time after he left, causing sore throats and various other forms of illness, in wayside inns, to his no small alarm and discomfort. On one of these occasions, that of an asphyxiating attack by midnight, he fell, not unnaturally, into an excess of religious emotion, appearing to feel that his life had been the wasted one of a mere dilettanti, and that he had been rather selfish in his conduct and ideals. In this there was perhaps an element of truth, but only an element; for, to begin with, a book like *Modern Painters* could scarcely have been conceived, still less continued, by a mere dilettanti; and secondly, supposing him to have been entirely occupied with selfish culture and acquisition of learning, he was only doing what every young son of a rich merchant must do by way of preparation, if he is to become a power for good in intellectual circles. The selfish student of to-day may be the unselfish teacher of to-morrow.

Ruskin, however, conceived himself to have received an answer to an urgent prayer, and recovered, and went on his way through France rejoicing. Only, as he neared the Channel, he found that his condition of spiritual exaltation was not a permanent thing; and by the time that he had reached Denmark Hill he had "sunk back," to use the words of

*Præterita*, "into the faintness and darkness of the underworld."

The last part of this year, 1845, was occupied by the second and third volumes of *Modern Painters*, which were more carefully though not more eloquently written than the first had been; the work of completing the second volume alone, in a final form, continued right through the spring of 1846. The publication took place in May or in June—we are not sure which—and gave to the thinking world all that the author had acquired in the dim Scuola in Venice; a great deal was made in this volume of Tintoretto, and a great deal of religious painting, which latter subject had rather fallen into disrepute in Britain.

The issue of the new volume did not produce such a stir as the issue of the former one had produced, but this, of course, was only to be expected, and did not irritate or disappoint Ruskin or his admirers in the very least. On the other hand, some of the critics must have been displeased to find that the author had nothing of any importance to recant after his fresh sojourn in Italy, a sojourn which many bold persons had prophesied would reform and abash him.

The labour of writing had been immense up to this time, and another holiday was thought desirable. So, as soon as the more pressing matters of business had been arranged with the publisher, the whole Ruskin family set off once more for the Alpine regions. They stayed at Geneva and then passed South, and entered Italy by the pass of the Mont

Cenis, and were soon in the streets of Turin, Verona, and Venice. Probably on account of the heat of the weather, they did not stay long in any one place, and ultimately returned to Switzerland, settling down in the beloved Chamounix. At Chamounix Ruskin probably wrote a good deal of the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and some of the rough drafts for the *Stones of Venice*; he certainly made a vast number of exquisite studies of rocks, flowers, glaciers, and clouds; indeed, speaking of clouds, it is doubtful whether the painter of the sky that flamed high above "The Fighting *Téméraire*" could himself portray the soft banners of the heaven with greater delicacy than he.

One wonders why a man who loved the Alpine regions so well, and had of them such an infinite understanding, never thought of living in Switzerland for a number of years, making it his headquarters. And perhaps the answer is that the worldly wisdom and kindly ambition of his parents kept enforcing upon him the claims of civilization.

Again, when the party returned that same year in the autumn to Denmark Hill, it was found that Ruskin was now an established literary man of great reputation, and that very much would in future be expected from him. Some years previously the Scotch poet Pringle had introduced him to Lockhart, the son-in-law of Scott; and now Lockhart sought out the young lion of the day and offered him a place on the *Quarterly Review*, of which he himself was at that time editor. The work promised and received was a species of glorified reviewing, de-



manding considerable tact, and, later on, leading to disputation, in cases where Ruskin wished to censure severely some protégé of the great journal. But on the whole the connection was a pleasant one, and led to a great deal of social advancement and happiness apart from the matter of literary progress.

Social happiness, we say; but there was more than social happiness; there was love—love which brought hope and joy for a little, and then misery, possibly sufficient misery to counterbalance all the benefits that one has mentioned. Lockhart's daughter, Charlotte, a very beautiful woman, completely fascinated Ruskin on the occasion of his meeting her at a party, but at the same time would have none of him, or pretended that she would have none of him, as is the manner of women. He, consumed by his passion, and undeterred by her coldness, was yet incapable of making love to her in a rational way; he tried to astonish and captivate her by pieces of fine writing in the *Quarterly Review*, and very naturally failed, not having to deal with an intense, æsthetic maiden of a later age.

It may seem an extraordinary thing, when one comes to consider it, that a man like Ruskin should never be able to enjoy the reciprocal love of a woman; but there is no reason why it should, for great and uncommon gifts in men do not necessarily attract the other sex, and are, on the contrary, apt to terrify them, or at the least fill them with uneasiness and abasement; Napoleon could command a Continent, but not the heart of a woman, and it is commonly held that the one empire destroyed, or, rather, pre-

vented the other. Another noteworthy point is that Ruskin was not sufficiently materialistic, and too incapable of sexual emotion to attract the ordinary girl, who, in spite of the returns of Church censuses, is less spiritual than a youth or a man; while, unfortunately for himself, it was the ordinary girl that the philosopher generally admired.

Meanwhile, he was so very unhappy that his body became affected through his mind, and he went off in search of health to Ambleside. This was in the spring of 1847. But, as Bacon says, or perhaps quotes, "he that loveth solitude is either a wild beast or a god"; and Ruskin was neither the one nor the other, and therefore found that the wilds of the Lake district, although pleasant at times, could not be made a panacea for melancholy unless the patient had some congenial companions there.<sup>1</sup>

Then, growing tired of Ambleside, and worse in nerves and spirit, he once again visited Dr. Jephson at Leamington. What Dr. Jephson advised is a mystery, but Ruskin's residence in the Spa was a brief one, the ordinary health resort being, as likely as not, hateful to him; and in a very short time the distracted moralist and lover is discovered at Crossmount, near Schiehallion, and the guest of an old Oxford friend, Macdonald Macdonald, a large landed proprietor. The life at Crossmount appears to have been quite in the old feudal style, which Ruskin re-

<sup>1</sup> But for some dear friends Ruskin would not have found Coniston tolerable in the last years of his life, for he was no misanthrope.

commends in *Fors Clavigera* as not a bad thing, and Macdonald was a high-minded and pleasant man, very much under the influence of the wave of reaction that had already set in in University circles against the school of the Tractarians on the one hand, and against fashionable infidelity on the other. The only rift within the lute was the question of sport, regarding which Ruskin was acquiring views more and more pronounced and intractable; for example, when descending Schiehallion, in the company of his host and the gamekeepers, bringing a hundred or so of living hares down in sacks as food for the tenantry, he did not like it, and angrily speculated all the while on an improved system of game-laws,<sup>1</sup> which would put all hares, pheasants, and rabbits into the possession of the people themselves,<sup>2</sup> and would not reserve them for the coursing or "battue" of gentlemen.

Then there fell upon him another deep fit of melancholy, and to cure it he found a small jungle of thistles at the foot of the great mountain, and devoted himself to their extirpation; he literally sat at times like Job or Jeremiah, among potsherds and thorns, not ceasing to speculate on why the universe existed, and whether there were a life after death,

<sup>1</sup> This was the age when all young Oxford men were trying to reform something; the game laws was a favourite object.

<sup>2</sup> If Ruskin was opposed to sport in the abstract, it was strange that it should make any difference to him whether the landlord or his tenants engaged in it. While, if he thought that the working classes would be more merciful to our flora and fauna than the genteel classes, he was mightily mistaken.

and what sort of life it might reasonably be expected to be. He sat, enjoying his selfish depression, listening to the shrieks of owls, whom he felt to be not unlike himself in some respects. Bats, sepulchral vaults, and churchyards were not by any means out of harmony with his mood; indeed, if he had stayed in the Scotch Highlands much longer, he might have become a second Dante, or a second Edgar Allan Poe. But Destiny was reserving him for other things.

Something drove him back to London, where he appears to have shut himself up, and spent most of his time in working at the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*. "It is work that keeps one sane."<sup>1</sup> And it was work that kept him sane, without a doubt.

He emerged from his seclusion, early in 1848, to travel with his parents to Perthshire; they probably were the guests of the few remaining relatives whom they had there, but they saw a great deal of the Grays, a Scotch family that had once lived at Herne Hill, and had now settled in the Fair City. Whether Ruskin was really in love with Euphemia Gray,<sup>2</sup> or whether he even believed himself to be, is open to question; but he became engaged to her, and, more outwardly successful than in any of his other similar experiences, married her in a parish church, early in April. The bride, an ambitious young woman, seems

<sup>1</sup> Graham Travers in one of her novels.

<sup>2</sup> When Euphemia Gray had come as a schoolgirl to the Ruskins at Herne Hill, the young author had written for her that beautiful fairy story, "The King of the Golden River."



to have rejoiced in the match, if only as a step upwards in society, which it most certainly was, and the honeymoon began and proceeded happily enough. The couple travelled through the South of England and passed over to the North of France, visiting all the glorious cathedrals of both regions<sup>1</sup>—Salisbury, Chartres, Amiens, most notably. Ruskin unfortunately was suffering from lung trouble<sup>2</sup> most of the time, and this was rather an ominous beginning of a union with a woman who worshipped physical health and strength, and seems to have been curiously unsympathetic toward nervousness and weakness. Finally, they returned to London, to Park Street West, where he at once engrossed himself in his literary and artistic work, making great headway with the two new books and the remaining volumes of *Modern Painters*.

The *Seven Lamps of Architecture* were Truth, Beauty, Power, Sacrifice, Obedience, Labour, Memory, and the author tries to attribute whatsoever is best in all the architecture that comes within his scope to the radiance shed by one of the seven or another. Unfortunately, as Ruskin himself admits, the title and scheme are both extremely arbitrary, the enumeration and division of the

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin, like William Morris, was inclined to place Teutonic and Gothic things above Latin and Greek things, and, like him, was specially fond of early French architecture.

<sup>2</sup> Pleurisy attacked him at Salisbury, and was very nearly fatal. The Cathedral there appealed to Ruskin, as it has appealed to so many thinking minds. It will be remembered how the late Oscar Wilde, in a letter to a friend, said, "Go to Salisbury, young man, and steep your hands in the grey twilight of Gothic things."

qualities not being one that is apparent to the mind prior to reading the work. It has been said that Matthew Arnold's definition of conduct as "three-fourths of life" is arbitrary, but it is nothing to this, for it is a self-evident fact that conduct, or the right doing of duties, is at least more than half of life; whereas no virtues except Perseverance and Imagination are readily associated with Architecture, while the Lamp of Power might be made to absorb all the other Lamps put together. The book, amid many contradictions, exhibits some broad lines of thought from which Ruskin never entirely broke away; one of these continual postulates is that there is a reciprocity between art and morals. This is true to a limited extent, but he carries the idea to absurdity, notably in some of the works of his Socialistic period, such as the *Crown of Wild Olive*, in which he condemns the ornament on the cover of a Persian Koran as immoral ornament, that was probably the work of a sensuous or a treacherous man, who preferred curved lines to straight ones. And in the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* itself he went too far, evidently being inspired to some extent by Plato and his theories of the Beauty of Holiness, and the Holiness of Beauty. Ruskin forgot that although there is such a thing as Holy Beauty, the fact does not give any one the liberty to assume an identity of Beauty and Holiness.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All the Platonists, or perhaps we should say all the disciples of Plato, as æsthete, follow the Greek, in escaping, when driven into a paradoxical position by the Socratic method, by means of putting

The style of the *Seven Lamps of Architecture* has been subject, like that of most of Ruskin's earlier works, to very severe criticism from a number of foolish persons to whom anything in the way of peroration, anything except the shortest sentences, the baldest and most simple Saxon way of stating a truth, are highly offensive. His sentences are of course long, and the subordinate clauses consequently very frequent; in fact, he used up all the relative pronouns, so that there were none left for Browning. But where would we be without eloquence? What would we not miss in the loss of Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, of Burke's speeches on the French Revolution, of Gladstone's periods on British foreign policy—we mean in the loss of them in their existing form of construction? Surely the modern craze for the imitation of America, the run upon the stock of full stops, is not to be allowed to deprive us of writers with styles of their own? For there is an evolution in style, whereby it may become justifiably more elaborate, as the facts to be described subdivide themselves from time to time.

The *Seven Lamps* being published in the spring of 1849, Ruskin set off once more for Switzerland; he mentions his family as being with him most of

a peculiar meaning upon the words Beauty, Holiness, Morality, whereas it is evident that if the meanings of words that are the representatives of fixed quantities and qualities in the minds of all the world are to be altered to meet a peculiar set of conditions, no one will know exactly where he stands, but all controversy will become like a meeting of fluid masses.

the time<sup>1</sup> (though he had his own carriage to stay behind with, if anything interested him specially), but he does not mention his wife. In fact, so silent is he with regard to her, that but for the biographies of Mr. Harrison and Mr. Collingwood, one would be apt to forget her existence, till he was reminded of it by the inevitable accounts of the celebrated divorce case.

To conclude this chapter, we do not know that we can do better than introduce some pages from *The*

<sup>1</sup> We forgot to mention that he did part company with his parents for a time, when travelling with his old college friend, Charles Newton, in the St. Gothard region. The two parted at Albergo Reale. It was, if we remember rightly, in this year also that Ruskin undertook, in company with another old friend, Edmund Oldfield, the filling of the east window of Camberwell Parish Church with painted glass. Ruskin's designs were exquisite, but too elaborate for the place; and he gracefully allowed Oldfield to alter them in the direction of simplicity; then he took it into his head, a little unreasonably, that he was not fit to undertake such work along with a decorator like Oldfield, and surrendered his part. One can imagine what a harvest the verger of this church would have reaped did it now possess a window altogether by John Ruskin. This episode (of the attempt at ecclesiastical decoration) seems to us as it were a connecting link in the comparison that we cannot help making between Ruskin and William Morris. Morris, just at the beginning of his career, had undertaken, in company with Burne-Jones and five or six others, the decoration of one of the rooms of a University building in Oxford with frescoes, but owing to the moisture of the place, and the material worked upon, the attempt can scarcely be called an enduring triumph. Again, Morris, like Ruskin, was the only son of indulgent parents, exhibited peculiar romantic feelings in childhood, was left with a fortune, began to draw and paint and gave it up, or at least made the gift subsidiary, and ended his days as a Socialistic reformer.



*Seven Lamps of Architecture*, which are remarkable both for their actual eloquence, and as exhibiting the great powers of association found in the book from which they are taken. They are to be found in "The Lamp of Memory."

"Among the hours of his life to which the writer looks back with peculiar gratitude, as having been marked with more than ordinary fulness of joy or clearness of teaching, is one passed, now some years ago, near time of sunset, among the broken masses of pine forest which skirt the course of the Ain, above the village of Champagnole, in the Jura. It is a spot which has all the solemnity, with none of the savageness of the Alps; where there is a sense of a great power beginning to be manifested in the earth, and of a deep and majestic concord in the rise of the long low lines of piny hills; the first utterance of those mighty mountain symphonies, soon to be more loudly lifted and wildly broken along the battlements of the Alps. But their strength is as yet restrained; and the far-reaching ridges of pastoral mountain succeed each other, like the long and sighing swell which moves over quiet waters from some far-off stormy sea."

"And there is a deep tenderness pervading that vast monotony. The destructive forces and the stern expression of the central ranges are alike withdrawn. No frost-ploughed, dust-encumbered paths of ancient glacier fret the soft Jura pastures; no splintered heaps of ruin break the fair ranks of her forests; no pale, defiled, or furious rivers rend their rude and changeful ways among her rocks. Patiently, eddy by eddy, the clear green streams wind along their well-known beds; and under the dark quietness of the undisturbed pines there sprung up, year by year, such company of joyful flowers as I know not the like of among all the blessings of the earth."

"It was spring-time, too; and all were coming forth in clusters crowded for very love; there was room enough for all, but they crushed their leaves into all manner of strange shapes only to be nearer each other. There was the wood anemone, star after star, closing every now and then into *nebulæ*; and there was the oxalis, troop by troop, the dark vertical clefts in the lime-stone choked up

with them, as with heavy snow, and touched with ivy on the edges—ivy as light and lovely as the vine; and ever and anon, a blue gush of violets, and cowslip bells in sunny places; and in the more open ground, the vetch and comfrey, and the wild strawberry, just a blossom or two, all showered amidst the golden softness of deep, warm, amber-coloured moss."

"I came out presently on the edge of the ravine: the solemn murmur of its waters rose suddenly from beneath, mixed with the singing of the thrushes among the pine boughs; and on the opposite side of the valley, walled all along as it was by gray cliffs of limestone, there was a hawk sailing slowly off their brow, touching them nearly with his wings, and with the shadows of the pines flickering upon his plumage from above; but with a fall of a hundred fathoms under his breast, and the curling pools of the green river gliding and glittering dizzily beneath him, their foam globes moving with him as he flew.

"It would be difficult to conceive a scene less dependent upon any other interest than that of its own secluded and serious beauty; but the writer well remembers the sudden blankness and chill which were cast upon it when he endeavoured, in order more strictly to arrive at the sources of its impressiveness, to imagine it, for a moment, a scene in some aboriginal forest of the New Continent. The flowers in an instant lost their light, the river its music; the hills became oppressively desolate; a heaviness in the boughs of the darkened forest showed how much of their former power had been dependent upon a life which was not theirs, how much of the glory of the imperishable, or continually renewed, creation is reflected from things more precious in their memories than it, in its renewing.

"Those ever-springing flowers and ever-flowing streams had been dyed by the deep colours of human endurance, valour, and virtue; and the crests of the sable hills that rose against the evening sky received a deeper worship, because their far shadows fell eastward over the iron wall of Joux and the four-square keep of Granson."

"It is as the centralization and protectress of this sacred influence that architecture is to be regarded by us with the most serious thought. We may live without her, and worship without her, but

we cannot remember without her. How cold is all history, how lifeless all imagery, compared to that which the living nation writes, and the uncorrupted marble bears ! How many pages of doubtful record might we not often spare, for a few stones left one upon another ! The ambition of the old Babel builders was well directed for this world : there are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture ; and the latter in some sort includes the former, and is mightier in its reality : it is well to have, not only what men have thought and felt, but what their hands have handled, and their strength wrought, and their eyes beheld, all the days of their life."

"The age of Homer is surrounded with darkness, his very personality with doubt. Not so that of Pericles : and the day is coming when we shall confess, that we have learned more of Greece out of the crumbled fragments of her sculpture than even from her sweet singers or soldier historians. And if indeed there be any profit in our knowledge of the past, or any joy in the thought of being remembered hereafter, which can give strength to present exertion, or patience to present endurance, there are two duties respecting national architecture whose importance it is impossible to overrate : the first, to render the architecture of the day historical ; and the second, to preserve, as the most precious of inheritances, that of past ages."

## SECOND QUARTER.

ARTISTIC LITERATURE AND CRITICISM

(1843-60).

### CHAPTER VI.

“THE STONES OF VENICE”—“MODERN PAINTERS”—  
“THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ART.”

THE winter of 1849-50 was spent in Venice by the young couple, and Ruskin managed to get completed an immense amount of work in the form of exquisite illustrative sketches, done with those fine lead points and delicate brushes that were used by our grandfathers, in an age when “broad treatment” was not so popular. Indeed, as an illustrator Ruskin is very well worthy of consideration, but, for some reason or other, receives very little of it. Possibly it is because he is so great in other departments.

Then comes the latter part of the year 1850 and the spring of the year 1851. This intervening space was devoted to the actual writing of the text of the *Stones of Venice*; and Ruskin threw himself into his task with all the greater abstraction and intentness that he felt his wife's affections slowly but surely ebbing away from him, and consequently the social



interests of life becoming fainter and fainter. He came out of his seclusion now and then; for example, when his wife insisted on being presented at Court—not so easy a matter as it became after the death of Prince Albert—and on similar occasions, enduring great misery all the while. But he went back to his books as soon as he could, without fail.

Early in 1851 Turner died; and his death was a terrible blow to Ruskin, to whom he had been master, friend, and protégé all in one. The latter was exceedingly angry with his countrymen for their neglect of the great painter, and not without justice. He himself had for years past been warning them that Turner was not immortal, and that they might wait long enough before they had another such as he; and he seemed to have spoken to them in vain. And now the genius that had conceived and the hand that portrayed so many noble scenes and events—the “Fighting *Téméraire*” towed to her last berth, her old ensign flying against the tremendous sunset, the memories of a hundred battles accompanying her, like invisible mourners, or incarnated in the little clouds that drift above her into the heaven of heavens—the Slaver driven about by the wrath of God and man, rocking down the immense trough of the Atlantic, and the old Greek hero of Homer’s tale taunting the mighty Cyclops, whose immense frame casts a shadow on the Dawn that streams across the alternating wave, this genius and that hand would delight the philosopher and irritate the newspaper critic no more. So Ruskin was very heavy of heart, having witnessed one of those instances of human

ingratitude and unworthiness that continued to depress him to the end of his days, and possibly led to his animus against Comte and Positivism.

But here it may be well to introduce a passage from the second edition of *Modern Painters*, part of it written prior to the death of Turner, and part of it afterwards:—

“And now but one word more, respecting the great artist whose works have formed the chief subject of this treatise. The greatest qualities of those works have not yet been so much as touched upon. None but their imitative excellencies have been proved, and therefore the enthusiasm with which I speak of them must necessarily appear over charged and absurd. It might, perhaps, have been more prudent to have withheld the full expression of it till I had shown the full grounds for it; but, once written, such expression must remain until I have justified it. And, indeed, I think there is enough, even in the foregoing pages, to show that these works are, as far as concerns the ordinary critics of the press, above all animadversion, and above all praise; and that, by the public, that are not to be received as in any way subjects or matters of opinion, but of faith. We are not to approach them to be pleased, but to be taught; not to form a judgment, but to receive a lesson. Our periodical writers, therefore, may save themselves the trouble either of blaming or praising: their duty is not to pronounce opinions upon the work of a man who has walked with nature threescore years; but to impress upon the public the respect with which they are to be received and to make request to him, on the part of the people of England, that he would now touch no unimportant work, that he would not spend time on slight or small pictures, but give to the nation a series of grand, consistent, systematic, and completed poems. We desire that he should follow out his own thoughts and intents of heart, without reference to any human authority. But we request, in all humility, that those thoughts may be seriously and loftily given; and that the whole power of his unequalled intellect may be exerted in the production of such works as may remain for ever, for the teaching

of the nations. In all that he says we believe, in all that he does we trust.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore that we pray to him to utter nothing lightly; to do nothing regardlessly. He stands upon an eminence, from which he looks back over the Universe of God, and forward over the generations of men. Let every work of his hand be a history of the one, and a lesson to the other. Let each creation of his mighty mind be both hymn and prophecy; adoration to the Deity, revelation to mankind."

"POSTSCRIPT.—The above passage was written in the year 1843; too late. It is true that, soon after the publication of this work, the abuse of the press, which had been directed against Turner with unceasing virulence during the production of his noblest works, sank into timid animadversion or changed into unintelligent praise;

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<sup>1</sup> Footnote to page of Second Edition :—

"It has been hinted, in some of the reviews of the second volume of this work, that the writer's respect for Turner has diminished since the above passage was written. He would, indeed have been deserving of little attention, if, with the boldness manifested in the preceding pages, he had advanced opinions based on so infirm foundation as that the course of three years could effect modification in them. He was justified by the sudden accession to power which the works of the great artist exhibited at the period when this volume was first published, as well as by the low standard of the criticism to which they were subjected, in claiming, with respect to his then works, a submission of judgment greater indeed than may generally be accorded to even the highest human intellect, yet not greater than such a master might legitimately claim from such critics; and the cause of the peculiar form of advocacy into which the preceding chapters necessarily fell has been already stated more than once. In the following sections it became necessary, as they treated a subject of intricate relations and peculiar difficulty, to obtain a more general view of the scope and operation of art, and to avoid all conclusions in any wise referable to the study of particular painters. The reader will therefore find, not that lower rank is attributed to Turner, but that he is henceforward compared with the greatest men, and occupies his true position among the most noble of all time."

but not before illness and, in some degree, mortification had enfeebled the hand and chilled the heart of the painter.

"This year (1851) he has no picture on the walls of the Academy, and the *Times* of May 3rd says:—'We miss those works of *Inspiration!*' We miss! Who misses? The populace of England rolls by to weary itself in the great bazaar of Kensington, little thinking that a day will come when those veiled vestals and prancing amazons, and goodly merchandize of precious stones and gold, will all be forgotten as though they had not been, but that the light that has faded from the walls of the Academy is one which a million of Koh-i-Noors could not rekindle, and that the year 1851 will, in the far future, be remembered less for what it has displayed than for what it has withdrawn.

"DENMARK HILL,

"June 1851."

Does not all this, especially the postscript, remind one of the case of Joseph Haydon the painter, who sat, in the spring of 1846, in a chamber off the Egyptian Hall, where the best of his works, including the "Christ entering Jerusalem," were on exhibition, and saw no one, or almost no one, entering, but marked the fashionable crowd—ladies, clergymen, grave statesmen, soldiers, and demi-mondaines—passing on to look at the new dwarf Tom Thumb! These are the tears of things.

The intervention of Ruskin on behalf of a nobler ideal and standard of art was proving itself more and more a success; but his intervention on behalf of Turner had been a little too late to benefit that great man much in any material manner; and this rendered Ruskin very melancholy and spoiled a good deal of the pleasure which the issue of the *Stones of Venice* ought to have given him. As for the book



itself, it was the fruit of very great labour, involving as it did an immense amount of research and special study, without which mere imaginative power could not succeed. It probably took longer in preparation and composition than Mr. Frederic Harrison would have us suppose. Mr. Harrison says that Ruskin decided to write the book just after the time of the issue of the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*. That makes the work last less than two years. But from evidence gleaned in various places, one may believe that there were at least various piles of rough writing, though perhaps not actually final text, well under weigh in 1848. However, the point is not very important.

The dominant idea in the *Stones of Venice* is that of illustrating the rise, continuance, and fall of the ocean republic in terms of her architecture, and, reciprocally, of illustrating the history of her architecture in terms of her political past. The moral attitude towards art and policy alike is very strong in the book, and, indeed, as in the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, is ridden to excess. Ruskin, too, often fell into the fatal habit of emphasizing a favourite principle of adducing certain sets of facts favourable to his case, as though the question were to turn upon them alone, and there were none but them to consider. This is a method more suited for the law-courts, where the issue is speedy, than for the open hall of philosophical dispute, where it is mostly slow, and one which if used in any other way will come back upon him that uses it.

This moral attitude of Ruskin towards art has

been so far explained in this little volume already; but, as there is no such thing as an explanation too thorough, let it be said in addition, that whereas to the frequenter of Exeter Hall bad art means art in which nude figures, or vulgar or else cruel scenes are displayed, either in sculpture or in some other form, to the eye, and good art everything else, to Ruskin things are different. To him every representation of Nature in the widest possible sense, done for the glory of God, also in the widest possible sense, and in cases where Nature, even in the widest possible sense, cannot be represented, but must rather be interfered with, every attempt to efface artifice,—this is good art. And he goes on to insist that men and women must be good men and women<sup>1</sup> before they can either paint or sing or carve or build in a way to make good art. And working from his definition of good art, as a representation of Nature in the widest possible sense, done for the glory of God, one might perhaps admit this. But to work from his definition is just what one cannot do. For whether the greatest painters or singers or carvers aim at the representation of Nature in the widest possible sense or not, the great majority of them do not do their representations, whatever they may be representations of, for the glory of God in the widest possible sense; not, at least, consciously. Again, if we try to escape from the dilemma by insisting that these persons, while consciously working selfishly

<sup>1</sup> “You cannot paint or sing yourselves into good men and women; but you must be good men and women before you can either paint or sing.”—Inaugural State Lecture.

and deliberately for the glory of themselves, are unconsciously working for the glory of God, we are caught in a net of difficulties that are beyond us, and have either got to resort to a Mr. Hyde,<sup>1</sup> who begins to paint or sing or carve for the glory of himself, and a Dr. Jekyll who completes for the glory of God the painting or the song or the carving which his worse half has begun; or else we come to this, that the mechanism of the Universe takes these representations done for the glory of the representers, and makes out of them just as much for the glory of God<sup>2</sup> as if they had been done by Ruskin's scarce saints for that very end; consequently, that whether our end be the glory of ourselves or the glory of God, the objective results will be the same. And it is, of course, with objective results that *Modern Painters*, the *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and the *Stones of Venice* occupy themselves. Furthermore, the theories of Ruskin regarding the characters of certain architects as deduced from the erections that they have left behind, seem to me, though perhaps not unwarranted, not often capable of verification. For example, it is not easy to tell what sins the builders of the Parthenon or of the Cathedral of Amiens may have committed in secret in their spare time. It is not easy to tell whether

<sup>1</sup> See Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. It is a good story, but it is doubtful to what extent it was meant to be symbolic.

<sup>2</sup> Nothing is more curious than the constant abuse of the phrase, "Glory of God." Even in the best of men there is, and can be, no conscious glorification of God in certain secular acts of daily life, such as eating certain articles of diet.

the model for the Venus di Milo was a saint or a courtesan; and if she was the latter, then the famous statue must be one of those copies of base things which Ruskin would discourage. Again, it is quite conceivable that men who were very dissipated indeed might have completed the Palace of the Doges in Venice, as long as they did not drink in a way to make their hands shake; one of the grandest of Scotch landscape-painters, a man who brought out the species of flowers and the stratification of rocks, as Ruskin complained that no one but Turner could or would, was most intemperate; while varied opinions are held as to the character of Fra Lippo Lippi. Lastly, if we accept Ruskin's inferences as to the sort of man that would design the cover<sup>1</sup> of a Bible in a maze of mere curves ending in nothing, then a devout lady of our acquaintance must be a whited sepulchre.

But, as Paley says, there is nothing more foolish than entirely to reject a story on account of the weakness of a part of it; and so the grandeur of the conceptions in the *Stones of Venice*, and of the manner of their materialization in print, must not for one moment be permitted to escape the mind. That the rise, pause, and decline of the Venetian architecture did coincide with the rise, pause, and decline of the Republic, Ruskin has established beyond contradiction; and both the art of Venice and Venice itself he has portrayed with an accuracy and a splendour of imagination to which the human brain can scarce conceive a parallel, even in the extreme scope of

<sup>1</sup> *Crown of Wild Olive.*



ancient and modern literature. He has not, of course, as has already been said, succeeded in proving that the one rise, pause, and decline were responsible for the other rise, pause, and decline, to the extent of his belief; and he falls into the error of supposing that, because something is contemporaneous with something else, or is subsequent to something else, it is the result of it. But so far as his facts and descriptions and even interpretations go, the book is a triumph of genius and inspiration, supreme, infinite, irresistible.<sup>1</sup>

The following passage, dealing with the Oriental love of colour in Venice, we cannot forbear from quoting:—

“Wherever the pure Oriental spirit manifests itself definitely, I believe its work is serious; and the meeting of the Eastern and Western races is perhaps marked in Europe more by the dying away of the grotesque laughter of the Goth than by other sign. I shall have more to say on this head in other places of this volume; but the point I wish at present to impress upon the reader is, that the bright hues of the early architecture of Venice were no sign of

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<sup>1</sup> In February 1892 the sixth chapter of the second volume of *The Stones of Venice* was prefaced (for separate publication) by the late William Morris. The chapter, of course, is headed, “The Nature of Gothic.” Morris says in his Preface, “I regard this chapter as one of the most important things written by the author: . . . it is destined to be considered in future days as one of the very few necessary and inevitable utterances of the century.” He goes on to say “that greatly as he values the artistic side of Mr. Ruskin’s work, [he believes] it was on the ethical and political side that Mr. Ruskin had had the most enduring and beneficent effect on his contemporaries, and would have through them on succeeding generations.”

gaiety of heart, and that the investiture with the mantle of many colours, by which she is known above all other cities of Italy and of Europe, was not granted to her in the fever of her festivity, but in the solemnity of her early and earnest religion. She became in after times the revel of the earth, the masque of Italy; and therefore is she now desolate: but her glorious robe of gold and purple was given her when first she rose a vestal from the sea, not when she became drunk with the wine of her fornication.

“ And we have never yet looked with enough reverence upon the separate gift which was thus bestowed upon her; we have never enough considered what an inheritance she has left us, in the works of those mighty painters who were the chief of her children. That inheritance is indeed less than it ought to have been, and other than it ought to have been; before Titian and Tintoret arose—the men in whom her work and her glory should have been together consummated—she had already ceased to lead her sons in the way of truth, and they erred much and fell short of that which was appointed them. There is no subject of thought more melancholy, more wonderful, than the way in which God permits so often His best gifts to be trodden under foot of men, His richest treasures to be wasted by the moth, and the mightiest influences of his Spirit, given but once in the world’s history, to be quenched and shortened by miseries of chance and guilt. I do not wonder at what men suffer, but I often wonder at what they lose. We may see how good arises out of pain and evil; but the dead, naked, eyeless loss, what good comes of that? The fruit struck to the earth before its ripeness; the glowing life and goodly purpose dissolved away in sudden death; the words, half spoken, choked upon the lip with clay for ever; or, stranger than all, the whole majesty of humanity raised to its fulness, and every gift and power necessary for a given purpose, at a given moment, centered in one man, and all this perfected blessing permitted to be refused, perverted, crushed, cast aside by those who need it most—the city which is Not set on a hill, the candle that giveth light to None that are in the house;—these are the heaviest mysteries of this strange world, and, it seems to me, those which mark its course the most. And it is true that the power with which this Venice had been entrusted was perverted, when at its highest, in a thousand miserable ways: still, it was possessed by

her alone; to her all hearts have turned which could be moved by its manifestation, and none without being made stronger and nobler by what her hand had wrought. That mighty Landscape of dark mountains that guard the horizon with their purple towers, and solemn forests that gather their weight of leaves, bronzed with sunshine, not with age, into those gloomy masses fixed in heaven, which storm and frost have power no more to shake or shed; that mighty Humanity, so perfect, so proud, that hides no weakness beneath the mantle, and gains no greatness from the diadem; the majesty of thoughtful form, on which the dust of gold and flame of jewels are dashed as the sea-spray upon the rock, and still the great Manhood seems to stand bare against the blue sky; that mighty Mythology, which fills the daily walks of men with spiritual companionship, and beholds the protecting angels break with their burning presence through the arrow-flights of battle: measure the compass of that field of creation, weigh the value of that inheritance that Venice thus left to the nations of Europe, and then judge if so vast, so beneficent a power could indeed have been rooted in dissipation or decay. It was when she wore the ephod of the priest, not the motley of the masquer, that the fire fell upon her from heaven; and she saw the first rays of it through the rain of her own tears, when, as the barbaric deluge ebbed from the hills of Italy, the circuit of her palaces, and the orb of her fortunes, rose together, like the Iris, painted upon the cloud."

## SECOND QUARTER.

ARTISTIC LITERATURE AND CRITICISM.

(1843-60).

### CHAPTER VII.

“MODERN PAINTERS”—“THE STONES OF VENICE”—  
“THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ART.”

ALTHOUGH we have noticed at such length the association with which Ruskin was always making of art with religion, we have not thought it worth while to notice in the same way his contributions to what may be called “pure religion,” because they have little significance, at least those prior to 1860. But mention might be made of one of them—namely, the *Construction of Sheepfolds*, issued in 1850. This book shows why Ruskin has never become a great religious teacher in the strict sense of the word; it shows that it is not because his genius is Hellenic rather than Hebraic, but that it is because he never realizes the depth of the chasms that divide religious sects from one another. His idea is, like that of a vast number of tolerant people to-day, that there is no serious difference between most of our



churches; notably between the two established Protestant churches in these islands; and that there is much common ground on which all, but notably these two, can unite and be permanently one. Whereas we are prepared to show not only that there exist serious differences between most of our churches, including the established ones, in these islands, but that there exist serious differences between sections of any one of them. It is rarely that even a single congregation is unanimous upon all essentials of the Christian faith. Why, we could name churches in which one man will sit silently denying the Resurrection, while another is reverencing the Virgin as on a level with the Holy Trinity. We could name a town in which there are two Anglican clergymen, of whom the one accepts the Bible, plus certain patristic writings,<sup>1</sup> as infallible; and the other does not accept either. Again, take the doctrines of original sin, the forgiveness of sin, the Incarnation, the resurrection of the body, justification by faith, the Deity of Christ, efficacy of baptism, heaven and hell, redemption, the virgin birth, the Sacraments, and try to get a unanimous vote from any Church Council on all of them, vital matters as they are, and see if you succeed, outside of Wales.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Certain injunctions of early fathers, which have been declared infallible by church councils, or at least quoted as standards, prior to the split which produced the Roman hierarchy as it now exists.

<sup>2</sup> There is here made a mental reservation to shut out of the case certain unusual periods and sets of circumstances when and where masses of people become so "Gott-betrunken," and genuinely so, as to forget for a space of time that they differ from one another on any subject. But the moment of vision is, in the very nature of

How such a mass of differing people could unite to preach an official,<sup>1</sup> standardized catechism either to the heathen<sup>2</sup> or to the submerged tenth is a question of lifetimes. They might, indeed, go together and clothe the naked and feed the hungry; and they do. Yet any unity other than a functional one for philanthropic Christian purposes is for the present impossible. But in the *Construction of Sheepfolds* this presently impossible unity is demanded, as though comparatively easy of accomplishment; the Presbyterian must not fight shy of the word "Bishop," and the Episcopalian must abolish the word "priest"; but it is evident that if anything more is to be involved than a mere meaningless alteration of definitions whose subjects remain the same, the demand of Ruskin has unhappily about as much chance as a deputation requesting a butcher to take the chair at a vegetarian meeting.

So the *Construction of Sheepfolds* has had practically no effect at all; and if anybody still reads it, it is only on account of the great name of its author. And what with the Anglican Church becoming more

things, temporary; and then creeds and confessions have to be calmly written and signed, and this is where sects and individuals clash with one another.

<sup>1</sup> The present ideal is an alliance for working purposes, not a union.

<sup>2</sup> As no Protestant church seems to be quite sure of its own theological ground, it is hard to see what it is to preach to the heathen. In some religious bodies you have advanced men of "heretical" tendencies teaching broad views in theological colleges at home and missionaries disseminating conservative views abroad. At this rate Africa will be Christian when Europe has become Deist.

and more a branch of the great Catholic stem from which the Reformation seemed to have severed it for ever, and what with the other churches gravitating towards individualism, an ecclesiastical amalgamation is for the present as much a dream as it ever was.

Meanwhile Ruskin was doing something very much more successful in a different sphere. He was taking up the cause of the pre-Raphaelites, the school of young artists, including Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Millais, and afterwards William Morris, who were determined to produce an art in which the highest imaginative power should be supplemented by all that was in accordance with known truth. He wrote *Pre-Raphaelitism*, a short book or large pamphlet, in 1851; and the thing achieved its purpose and cast a halo of glory over the brotherhood.

Those were good times in which to be alive. "Things," in the widest possible sense of the word, looked very hopeful, and, indeed, were better than they had ever been before, and possibly have been in later days. It looked as though this world were to revolve more happily, and as though the next were to become more attractive. It looked as though new poets were to get a hearing and new painters a review. It looked as though poor men, shut out from the best society, were to be admitted into it if they proved themselves at all worthy of it. It looked as though prosperity and timely concessions would cut the ground from under the feet of Anarchy. It looked as though the Anglo-Saxon were at last to admit that other forms of civilization had a right to

exist besides his own. It looked as though universal arbitration were at hand. And in spite of the Crimean War, the Mutiny, and the American Civil War, the illusion lasted until Bismarck and Disraeli broke it up. And pre-Raphaelites and social reformers rejoiced in those fifties as a young girl rejoices in the spring-time. George du Maurier has described the state of affairs admirably in his romances.

Finally, Darwinism, and all that its mighty truths involve, were not yet prominent or, except in foreshadowings, even existent; and every one was willing to listen to the Gospel According to Everybody Else.

Ruskin's gospel was still the same that had electrified the Academy in 1843, the Platonic gospel of the inexhaustible and unsuspected beauty of the Universe of God; the beauty which so many eminent men had tried to conceal, and which so many uneminent ones seem at the present moment anxious to abolish altogether.

In 1852 he was for a long time in Venice, and, as it would appear, alone, while working constantly at the second and third volumes of the *Stones of Venice*, and doing something in the way of rough notes at least to the third, fourth, and fifth volumes of *Modern Painters*. He also spared time to correspond with the poet Rogers.

In 1853 came one of the saddest crises in Ruskin's life. The gulf between Mrs. Ruskin and himself had been widening and ever widening, and only the absence of any actual rival to the husband up to this time had deferred the inevitable separation. Mrs. Ruskin had the view that marriage was not marriage



without motherhood, and finding that the latter satisfaction could not well be hers in her present union, all that she awaited was the arrival of another lover. And he came, in the person of John Everett Millais himself, before very long. The couple were staying at Glenfinlas, in Perthshire, for the summer, and the future President of the Academy visited them there. The attraction that arose between him and Mrs. Ruskin was mutual; and, to cut a long story short, she very shortly left her husband's home for that of her parents, and then that of her parents for that of Millais. Of course a decree of nullity of marriage had to be obtained and a consequent divorce, and that was a much more difficult matter in those days. Newspaper columns were written and tongues wagged, and altogether it must have been an uncomfortable year for all concerned. Opinions differed as to the rights and wrongs of the cases, and they do still differ. We have tried to take the most favourable view of the conduct of Mrs. Ruskin, but must confess that a very different interpretation might be put upon the fact that she permitted her marriage to last for five years, and only complained of its nullity after many interviews with Millais.

Meanwhile, Ruskin sought what solace he required in work, writing a good deal upon the great painter Giotto<sup>1</sup> for the Arundel Society,<sup>2</sup> using for this

<sup>1</sup> Giotto, a painter unduly neglected even by Pater, figures largely in *Fors Clavigera*.

<sup>2</sup> The Arundel Society has a resemblance to the Grolier, Ray, and Text societies. Its main concern is the issue of rare books, or of books on abstruse subjects.

purpose the mass of notes and drawings that he had accumulated at Padua, when in that city. He also occupied himself with *Modern Painters*, and placed the proofs of the last two volumes of the *Stones of Venice* in the hands of Messrs. Smith & Elder.<sup>1</sup> Besides this, he delivered a great number of lectures and composed a great number of letters and pamphlets. Most of these lectures, letters, and pamphlets have been since included in volumes under various titles. He travelled to Edinburgh, and lectured there before the Philosophical Institute upon various departments of architecture, creating an immense and profound impression.

In 1854 he began to associate himself with Edward Denison Maurice and Charles Kingsley in their scheme for the education of ambitious men of the working classes. Hunt and Rossetti were with him; so the teaching of Art flourished apace, alongside of the teaching of literature and history. Those were the days when one thought to regenerate humanity by the help of the schoolmaster. How one has been disappointed!

Part of this year was spent in Switzerland with his parents, to whom the separation from his wife had restored him. Many illustrations intended for the fourth and fifth volumes of *Modern Painters* were made on this particular tour, together with some that should have embellished a "History of Switzerland" that unfortunately never saw the light.

The year 1855 was simply spent in quiet writing

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin's connection with Smith & Elder began with his cousin having been a clerk with them.

and teaching, what Browning would have included under his phrase, "A good man's unrecorded acts," whereas a biographer can only take hold of finished publications or of long journeys.

1856 was the year in which the *Harbours of England* was issued. Under a prosaic title this book hides a good deal of romance and some very fine writing. The marine paintings of Turner, of course, form the main subject, being, in fact, reproduced as illustrations. The picture of the "Fighting *Téméraire*" is pathetically described; and there is a vast deal of the indescribable, incommunicable romance of the sea, a romance that cannot exist within a definition, a romance felt in the old days by Jason, when he made libation to all the gods, and put off toward the sunset through the violet wave, and still felt by some others of us, when pieces of the Orient are borne into our consciousness by the liner that breasts the Thames or the Clyde.

In 1857 Ruskin delivered two lectures at Manchester, and then included them in the volume, *The Political Economy of Art*, the rare first edition of which is before us as we write. This book is remarkable, not so much for its own merits, as that it is the last work of what we call the second period of his career, his moralist period. His pages are still devoted to art, whatever diversions may be made against social evils. But something tells the reader that this will not be always the case; that this man will be an economist<sup>1</sup> and a politician before he has finished. Indeed, in the last of the four chapters

<sup>1</sup> Not an ordinary economist; he could not abide them.

into which the two lectures are divided, the joint in the welding, so to speak, practically appears. The four chapters are headed, "Discovery," "Application," "Accumulation," "Distribution." In "Discovery," the question is asked, "How are we to find out the men of artistic genius in our midst?" In "Application," the question is asked, "What are we to do with these men of genius, when once we have found them?" In "Accumulation," the question is asked, "How, and to what extent, are we to preserve the fruits of their genius?" In "Distribution," the question is asked, "Are these fruits to be distributed to private or to public institutions? Should they not be kept in our seats of learning, and so constantly kept before the view of the younger generations?"

There are some very curious suggestions in the volume, such as one to the effect that the Government should start a manufactory for the colours of artists, because private firms can no longer be trusted to give us them permanent.<sup>1</sup> With regard to another suggestion to the effect that the Government should go a step further, and provide drawing paper of a sure standard, at the price of a shilling a sheet, one can only think that the lecturer fancied himself to be addressing an audience of millionaires.<sup>2</sup> And all

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin doubtless had in his mind the fading away of some of the finest works of Turner. That great man's pictures are notoriously evanescent; indeed, it has been affirmed that he sacrificed permanency to splendour and vividness, his marvellous effects being the product of pigments that are naturally fugitive.

<sup>2</sup> With all Ruskin's Socialistic sympathies there are constantly cropping up signs in his writings that his home circumstances were of such a character as to prevent his quite appreciating the limited-



through the volume there is a great deal of denunciation of what may be called uncriminal sins, from the demands for excessive prices by picture dealers, down to the absorption of labour in sewing flounces on ball-dresses. Reading these denunciations in the light of the introductory address, one assuredly gathers that the author would have a paternal government crowd the police-courts with all uncriminal sinners, and pass sumptuary laws as well; and one arrives at the conclusion that before the Ruskinian system could be brought into operation, the number of our Government officials, especially of the inspecting class, would have to be something unparalleled in history.

Fully one quarter of the book is taken up with Addenda, the first Addendum being a dialogue between Ruskin and an objector, in which the objector

ness of the incomes of people even of the upper classes,—as, of course, we know that they were. He talks wildly of the nation giving twenty thousand pounds, if necessary, for some foreign picture not intrinsically worth as much. He never, on the other hand, could sympathize with artists whose desire was to make money. Turner, he says, had seventeen shillings a week, and no bad pay either. But how could Turner, or any one else with such a wage, have spent a shilling on drawing-paper every time he wanted to execute a water-colour drawing? Again, in *Fors Clavigera* he opens one of his letters—and it is necessary to remember that they were addressed to workmen—with a recipe for a game-pie once made by some lady of quality. The pie is to contain a hare, a goose, a turkey, and six woodcock or so. Supposing this is meant for a joke, it is difficult to see how a man who had spent his hard-earned savings on *Fors*, in the hope of some material advantage being suggested to him, could enjoy it, while only a millionaire with a baker's oven at hand could take the thing seriously.

gets something of a repulse, like Sandford in his controversies with Mr. Barlow. Indeed, in all the great author's argumentative writings there is a little too much of the setting up and knocking down of nine-pins. But whatever may be thought of his manner of indicating the opinions of his opponents, it must be admitted that he expresses his own most powerfully. Nor is there any one who can strike the tender chord of pathos more lovingly than he, in the interval of his thunders; as any one will admit who reads in the *Political Economy of Art* the passage that describes the struggles of the unrecognized painter, and the decline of his loving wife through starvation, and the metaphorical pouring of gold into the coffin of the genius after life has left him.

The *Elements of Drawing*, a manual for students of Art, was also issued in 1857, a little before the aforesaid volume in fact: so that one may consider the latter as concluding the series of works that were the fruit of Ruskin's first period, the fifth volume of *Modern Painters*, published in 1860, being an overflow, and not a complete book in itself. As for the years 1858 and 1859, they are not biographer's years, being almost entirely occupied with lectures of all kinds, lectures to working men's clubs, lectures to Oxford men, lectures to Cambridge men, lectures to ladies' colleges. Some of these lectures have been included in *A Joy for Ever*, with which the *Political Economy of Art* has itself been incorporated, but many of them have never appeared in print so far as we are aware. There was also much time spent in founding museums and picture galleries, or branches

and offshoots from them, in various parts of the country. In fact, Ruskin and his friends were doing, with differing success, what is now being done by the nation in the way of acquainting the populace of the country with the best that has been said, painted, and discovered. Of course the efforts of a Government will always be more sustained, and will reach further than those of private individuals. Yet it is certain, on the other hand, that in the modern evening continuation class we miss the personal element that is of such an immense importance, the impulsive interest of William Morris, the eccentricity of Kingsley. We no longer appear to encourage character, however much we may stimulate mental agility. And, whereas most of the workmen and others that entered the lecture rooms founded by Frederick Denison Maurice and his companions were grateful, nobody is grateful to a rate-supported system. Then while the Oxford Liberals only regarded their own labours as a stop-gap between an age of ignorance and one of popular legislation, and found it their chief difficulty that they had not enough education or enough educators to go round, we find it our chief difficulty to get for our highly educated, hyper-sensitive millions, positions in life suitable to their high education and hyper-sensitive-ness. It may be cruelty and not kindness to give a man the culture of a professor when he has got to be a cab-driver; and if it be said in reply that we are giving him the power to cease to be a cab-driver and become a professor, we answer "No, we are not giving him the power, but only the desire." If he

were one out of a few persons to whom we gave culture the matter would be altogether a different one ; but since he is only one unit out of millions to whom we give culture, while there are not millions of vacant chairs, all that we are doing is to keep him in the ranks of life's battle, while making him infinitely more sensitive to the wounds received there. All that our Carnegies and Macnamaras are apt to accomplish is the transference of the struggle for existence from the artisan class to the professional class, and the concentration of the enormous necessary taxation upon the incomes of those whose children reap least benefit from its expenditure.

But the doctrine now preached in all directions, that this expenditure has for its main object the retention of our position as a nation among other nations, our brutal survival of them, was not Ruskin's doctrine. His object was to make every individual that came within the scope of his influence open his eyes to the marvels of God's universe ; and he would have told us that it matters very little whether the British people beat the German people in the production of aniline dyes, or whether they excel them in building battleships, but that it does matter a great deal whether the British individual enjoys himself in the best and most righteous sense. Differing from Herbert Spencer on almost every conceivable point, Ruskin agrees with him in this, that to speak of society as if it were not composed of single persons is an error. Both these philosophers know that thousands of people are going about saying, "all this expense cannot benefit me and mine, but



it will benefit the race now, and in days to come"; whereas it is they and theirs that are all the race there is now, and people like themselves, and not some mysterious unborn demi-god, that will be all the race there will be in days to come. And the philosophers see what these people themselves cannot see—namely, that there are thousands of them. So they would tell them the truth, and add that life is short, and that what does not make the individual truly happy during it, may not necessarily make the race truly happy after he is dead.<sup>1</sup> The two differ widely in their ideas of happiness and the methods of its acquirement. This is not the place to deal with the philosophy of Herbert Spencer; but the philosophy of Ruskin, however Socialistic it may seem to become, takes more account of Beauty than that of the Synthetic *savant*, and, indeed, more account of Beauty than any earthly philosophy except Plato's. And the Democracy of Ruskin differs from the Democracy of every other politician except that of William Morris, insomuch as it is a Democracy devoted to Beauty, physical and mental—and from that of William Morris, insomuch as it is a Democracy devoted to extreme spiritual Beauty as well. Finally, it is a Democracy that will spoil nothing that is lovely and revere nothing that is base.

<sup>1</sup> For each generation, "the race," will be sacrificed in turn for ever, treated by sociologists and eugenists, like prize-cattle.

## THIRD QUARTER.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIALISTIC.

(1860-84.)

### CHAPTER VIII.

As has been said, Ruskin could not abide political economists—that is to say, political economists in the ordinary sense. But, in a sense of his own, he himself was a political economist, bringing to the study of wealth and its problems a fine imagination and a stern morality, but no science. Indeed, he could not believe that there was, or should be, any science in the matter at all. Science, he would say, is an affair of the intellect, but the management of human beings, and the question of what is to be their staff of life, and how it is to be best placed within their hands, is, or ought to be, an affair of the heart. He considered most theories of the reciprocity of money and labour to be cold, unsympathetic, and mechanical, leaving room for little charity and less imagination, and regarded the inventors and advocates of them as personifications of all their worst features. Thus he came to be unfair and unkind to John Stuart Mill, than whom

a larger-hearted man never lived, and to many other estimable men.

Truth, of course, lies in the middle of things; and while Ruskin was wrong in excluding all science and mathematics from the estimation of the wealth of nations and of classes, and Mill correspondingly right in including them, Ruskin was right in including other things than science and mathematics, and Mill correspondingly wrong in excluding them.

But, for good or for evil, and mostly for good, Ruskin entered into a new province in the year 1860. The four essays published in the *Cornhill Magazine*, under the editorship of Thackeray, formed his introduction, and excited a vast deal of attention among all sorts of educated people. The first of the essays, "Ad Valorem," deals with Worth, and another of them, "Qui Judicatis Terram," deals, as might be expected, with Justice. And in its purely political scope, as opposed to its political-economical scope, the book is in full reaction against the aristocratic masterfulness of Conservatism on the one hand, and against the *laissez faire* policy of Liberalism on the other. The Preface, which one could more readily conceive to be the work of an Earl of Shaftesbury than of a critical æsthete, is worth quoting from. It suggests:—

"First, that there should be training schools for youth established, at Government cost, and under Government discipline, over the whole country; that every child born in the country should, at the parents' wish, be permitted (and in certain cases be under penalty required) to pass through them; and that in these schools the child should, with other minor pieces of knowledge (hereafter to be con-

sidered), imperatively be taught, with the best skill of teaching that the country could produce, the following three things:—

“(a) The laws of health, and the exercises enjoined by them;

“(b) Habits of gentleness and justice; and

“(c) The calling by which he is to live.

“Secondly, that in connection with these training schools there should be established, also entirely under Government regulations, manufactories and workshops for the production and sale of every necessary of life, and for the exercise of every useful Art. And that, interfering no whit with private enterprise, nor setting any restraints or tax on private trade, but leaving both to do their best, and beat the Government if they could—there should at these Government manufactories and shops be authoritatively good and exemplary work done, and pure and true substance sold; so that a man could be sure, if he chose to pay the Government price, that he got for his money bread that was bread, ale that was ale, and work that was work.

“Thirdly, that any man or woman, or boy or girl out of employment, should be at once received at the nearest Government school, and set to such work as it appeared on trial they were fit for, at a fixed rate of wages determinable every year; being found incapable of work through ignorance, they should be taught; or being found incapable of work through sickness, they should be tended; but being found objecting to work, they should be set, under the strictest compulsion, to the more painful and degrading of necessary toil, especially to that in mines and other places of danger (such danger being, however, diminished to the utmost by careful regulation and discipline), and the due wages of such work be retained, cost of compulsion first abstracted—to be at the workman’s command so soon as he has come to sounder mind respecting the laws of employment.

“Lastly, that for the old and destitute, comfort and home should be provided; which provision, when misfortune had been by the working of such a system sifted from guilt, would be honourable, instead of disgraceful, to the receiver. For (I repeat this passage out of my *Political Economy of Art*, to which the reader is referred for further detail) ‘a labourer serves his country with his spade, just as a man in the middle ranks of life serves it with sword, pen, or



lancet. If the service be less, and therefore the wages during health less, then the reward when health is broken may be less, but not less honourable; and it ought to be quite as natural and straightforward a matter for a labourer to take his pension from his parish, because he has deserved well of his parish, as for a man in higher rank to take his pension from his country, because he has deserved well of his country.'"

Opinions may differ as to the chances that a private tradesman, under the scheme described, would have of successfully competing with a wealthy Government; opinions may differ as to the desirability of making parochial relief attractive, and questions may be asked as to why, with such a Utopian system at work, there should be any necessity for parochial relief at all; but there can only be one opinion, and no question, of the earnestness of the writer.

In another part of the book the author, to a certain extent, modifies the comparison between the labourer with his spade and the soldier with his sword, and gives a list of the different dignities of men in civilized communities, placing the soldier at the top, and the merchant or middleman at the bottom.

This is the Japanese view, and the view of Carlyle as well; and it is curious to find Ruskin accepting it with approval. The truth is that, like the sage of Chelsea, he regards the soldier as one of the few remaining realities of the age. The parson preaches but does not convert; the professor lectures, but does not convince either himself or other people; the shipbuilder builds, but puts in devil-bolts; whereas the soldier does actually stand up to be shot, or,

rather, is always ready to stand up thus. And it is for this readiness to stand up to be shot, and not for the corresponding readiness to stand up to shoot, that Ruskin admires the soldier; wherein he differs from Carlyle, who prefers heroes to martyrs.

Again, the reason why Ruskin agrees in placing merchants or middlemen at the bottom of the list is that they are unproductive, and are merely intermediaries between two sets of manufacturers, and because there has been more dishonesty among them than among all the other classes of citizens. As might be expected, he takes care to make a special reservation in favour of his beloved Florentines.

Then in other places he proceeds to attack all the preconceived notions of having money, spending money, enjoying money. He asserts that the value of money has never been properly defined by political economists; that one who cannot use money for the best cannot be said to possess it or any right to it; that it is no benefit of money that it should merely make money, the benefit really being the good done, incidentally, during the increase. The following quotation may be taken as an illustrative one:—

“And first of possession. At the crossing of the transepts of Milan Cathedral has lain for three hundred years the embalmed body of St. Carlo Borromeo. It holds a golden crozier, and has a cross of emeralds on its breast. Admitting the crozier and emeralds to be beautiful articles, is the body to be considered as ‘having’ them? Do they, in the politico-economical sense of property, belong to it? If not, and if we may, therefore, conclude generally that a dead body cannot possess property, what degree and period of animation in the body will render possession possible?

“As thus: lately in the wreck of a Californian ship, one of the

passengers fastened a belt about him with two hundred pounds of gold in it. Now, as he was sinking, had he the gold? or had the gold him? ”

Once more, in an instructive passage, Ruskin points out that coins are signs or tokens of past labour, for which a certain amount of reciprocal labour is demanded, or, rather, that this is what they ought to be: he complains that thousands of these tokens concentrate in the hands of people who have never personally done any labour, and that they are able to make calls for supposed reciprocal labour upon every one else, often making them do what is not profitable in the true sense; and, further, that there are men whose whole life-work is the manipulation of masses of these same tokens, as if they were not tokens at all, but absolute chattels representing nothing but themselves; or, worse still, the manipulation of scrawled notes, which are supposed to be tokens of tokens, but too often have no ultimate bullion behind them.

*Unto This Last* is really not only an indictment of common political economy, but an indictment of finance, an indictment of an age of paper; and the only unfortunate thing is that its logical principles, many of them just and admirable, could not be carried out, except by a return to the system of barter. Such a book could not fail to meet with a tempest of hostile criticism, being denounced by the same writers as both Quixotic and dangerous. And since, if it were Quixotic, it could not be really dangerous, and if it were dangerous could not be really Quixotic, the truth stands revealed that it

must have made some serious impression on the country at large, and, at the same time, a great deal more impression on the critics themselves than they cared to admit.

It ought to have been added that, in expansion of his own definitive sentence with which he brings *Unto This Last* to a conclusion, Ruskin rightly holds that country to be the happiest which produces the greatest possible number<sup>1</sup> of noble and joyful human beings. No scene is complete unless there sound across it "deep-toned voices of men and wayward trebles of children." Only he cannot, and no one can, tell us how to make sure that each new personality will become noble and joyful. And holding, as at this time he does, the extreme Calvinistic doctrines,<sup>2</sup> that those who shall enter into heaven are

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in these congested days one would say "percentage."

<sup>2</sup> One is constantly being warned that Calvin must not be confused with some of the debased forms of dogmatism that take his name. Thus it is affirmed that Calvin's scheme of predestination was not what it is commonly held to be. But we think that both Calvin and the best Calvinism hold these two views that we attribute to them. The questions whether the lost deserve eternal torment, and whether they are entirely to blame for their torment, have comparatively little to do with the case. For suppose a magician were to tell a woman, just before the birth of her son, that the child would wilfully get himself lost through the exercise of his own free-will; or even to tell her that the odds were five to three that he would (five to three is a liberal measure in the light of Calvinism), we believe she might have almost as hard thoughts of the Deity, the Universe, and herself, as though the statement were that the child would be lost without his free-will getting a chance. Calvinism would say to her, "It's none of your business; see that you do your duty. Most of your descendants, according to the Church's interpretation



few, and that those who do not enter into heaven are tortured eternally; that is to say that the chances, looked at from before each birth, are in favour of endless misery for the person born, he is taking a strange line from his own point of view, is inconsistent.

In *Time and Tide*, published some years later, he seems to become a Malthusian, discouraging large families, although, unlike Malthus, advocating early marriages. Whereas, when *Time and Tide* appears, he has ceased to be a Calvinist.

The fact is that the movements of the heart and brain of Ruskin are like the moves of the knight at chess—surprising, variable, and sometimes delightful.

Nothing particular occurred in 1861. But in 1862 Ruskin began to issue *Munera Pulveris*, at least the collection of essays that afterwards filled the volume of that name. It was Froude who accepted them on behalf of *Fraser's Magazine* (at that time a power in the country), even as a previous editor had accepted the *Sartor Resartus* of Carlyle. Indeed, there having arisen a friendship between Carlyle and Ruskin, it is

of Scripture, will be lost, and deservedly so; but you have comparatively little to do with that." And if the doctrines in the Athanasian Creed, the Confession of Faith, the Thirty-nine Articles, on this subject were literally,—as they were taught in 1860, and as the writer of *Unto this Last* believed them—true, and most people, since they wilfully rejected Christianity, deliberately lost themselves, and were actually burned, then at the last analysis, always the last analysis, the command in Genesis, approved in the Book of Common Prayer, and by Ruskin up to 1865, to "multiply and replenish the earth," might seem a command to make fuel for Apocalyptic fire.

possible that the influence of the former made the arrangement possible. The motive at all events must have been a strong one, for the essays were anything but likely to comply with that world-wide Procrustean standard, the "taste of readers," and had by all accounts ultimately to be discontinued to save the life of the magazine. They form the natural development of *Unto This Last* and its philosophy, even as *Unto This Last* forms the natural development of *The Political Economy of Art* and its philosophy. They occupy themselves with purely social and political matters, dealing with such questions as Mastership, Commerce, and Government. They continue the attacks of the previous volume upon finance, and reassert that the only true wealth is Life. Yet, while disapproving of the Toryism that excludes competent men of the people from the charmed circles of Government, and destroys a parish to make a deer-forest, they are in no sense sympathetic to the Radicalism of the period, which holds that Jack is as good as his master, and alternately curses the aristocracy for existing and exercising its functions, and censures it for existing without exercising them. Ruskin, like Carlyle, would have kings, churches, and aristocracies remain, and lead a real and reformed life, whereas the true Radical prefers to let them fill the cup of their iniquity full, and then make short work of them. Therefore, he is not popular with either of the great political parties as a politician, any more than he is popular with either of the great divisions of British Protestantism as a theologian. We

should perhaps use the past tense rather than the present in this last sentence, because the political situation has become one great confusion, and both the aforesaid great parties have gone like balls of mercury tumbling on a stair, leaving us with Protectionist and Free Trader, Clerical and Anti-clerical, Imperialist and Little Englander.

But, at all events, Ruskin, like most persons of genius, would never have fallen into line with any large mass of people in any matter; they must follow him, not he them. And while we distrust the dogma that divides men into two classes, those born to command and those born to obey, because it embodies the principle of the excluded middle, and cannot be applied to the colourless and complicated life of recent times, yet we should, without hesitation, place Ruskin among the commanders. And we should say that he was a commander with very excellent lieutenants, but very few troops, his attitude on many subjects being too uncompromising to appeal to the ordinary ambitious artisan, and not uncompromising enough to satisfy the inglorious Miltons,<sup>1</sup> not altogether mute, who lecture in our parks.

There is not very much to be told of the year 1863 so far as our subject is concerned, the months of that year being mostly occupied in furious newspaper controversies, negotiations with Froude, and teaching in the Working Men's College and other similar institutions. In 1864 Mr. Ruskin, senior, died at a very advanced age, the March wind

<sup>1</sup> They are not Miltons; but we call them that, to save the quotation.

seeming to cut him down like an overgrown flower that looks as though it might last in the garden for ever. The event must have been a terrible blow to his son, who had come to regard his father as a permanent institution, having lived under the same roof with him for forty years, during a period extending for forty-five years. The stately house, which the family had now inhabited long enough to feel something of the old atmosphere of Herne Hill in it, the grounds that grew fairer every summer, and echoed the steps of those who were so dear to the owner, and the voices of friends amiable and distinguished, the works of Art, the succession of priceless Turners, each with some story or some loving memory attached to it, all this must be finally left behind. One would be reminded of the magnificent passage in the *French Revolution* of Carlyle describing the death of Louis the Well-beloved and containing the phrase "sumptuous Versailles bursts asunder like a dream," were it not that the King of Terrors had not the power to cast the venerable man into despair. The world and its well-earned luxury must indeed be surrendered, and an entry be made into the pale and illimitable kingdoms. But Mr. Ruskin had the sense of having been "an entirely honest merchant," and, better still, of possessing something of that hope of Christianity which prophesies a safe conduct through all the worlds to come.

The author of *Modern Painters* had, on his part, little to repent of in his past intercourse with his father. Differences there had been, as must be the case between a prosperous, conservative business



man, something of a Philistine, and a Socialistic æsthete, and consequently a large number of subjects which the two would consider it better not to discuss with one another. But the mere fact of the household having for such a long period of time continued to exist in its original form shows that these differences and forbidden subjects had not led to quarrels. And comparatively few literary men, in reviewing their past family lives, can expect so much as this to be said on their behalf. One regards the Carlyles, and reads the controversy that has been raging above their dust, one considers the estrangement between Newman and his brother, one recalls the pain which the wanderings of De Quincey gave to his relatives, the miserable home-life of George Sand, Verlaine, and the gentle "Elia," and then one turns to Ruskin with a new wonder and a new respect.

Meanwhile he was left with his aged mother, to whom it was now more than ever necessary that he should be a comfort and a support. But as both of them were very far from fit to do the honour of the house, she being in physical, he in mental trouble, they invited to reside with them a second cousin of hers, Joan Agnew, a bright and highly cultivated young woman, who came to fulfil her charitable office in the most brilliant manner possible.

In 1865 Ruskin was busy with the issue in parts of the *Crown of Wild Olive*, which consists of lectures on work, traffic, war, and other subjects. Some of the lectures were delivered to the students of Woolwich College, and the spectacle of one who was constantly

denouncing war from the platform going to instruct a number of young men whose whole career was to be bloodshed had struck the public mind rather forcibly, and even ludicrously. Many people had expected some exhibition of bad taste, and others had said that it was bad taste for the great critic to go to Woolwich at all. Yet Ruskin neither made a fool of himself nor bad soldiers of his audience; and though one cannot but feel in reading the book that he was adapting himself to his hearers in such a way as to be inconsistent at times with his own past, yet, on the whole, his speech is both worthy and dignified. The Indian Mutiny was then still fresh in people's minds, and Ruskin saw that anything connected with India would therefore be a sure attraction in the way of a subject, especially to youths about to enter Her Majesty's forces, and in many cases about to leave for the East. So he introduced an Indian sword, with a subtilely worked hilt and guard, pointed out that no European hand could be sufficiently delicate to pass into the latter, next remarked upon the fineness of the metal-work, insisting that it was the typical product of an old, but sensual, cruel, and false civilization; good men, he holds, love a straight line, and when they employ curves do not employ them for the mere sake of the curves: better the rough but high ambitions of the Goth than the decadent attainments of the Oriental. And down the blade of that weapon the most wonderful things come running in irregular succession, until the lecture ends and the lights are extinguished.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Note referring to Persian book cover in an earlier chapter.

## THIRD QUARTER.

### ECONOMIC AND MORALISTIC.

(1860-84).

### CHAPTER IX.

WE do not think that there is a word in the Latin language for "ethics"; but calling "ethics" the study of conscience, and consequently the study of duties, and translating "munera" by duties, we at once see a close resemblance between the titles *Munera Pulveris* and *Ethics of the Dust*. And yet the two books are very different, the one being a political Nehemiah, and the other the most delightful and nonsensical scientific text-book that ever was written.

Ruskin had been lecturing on mineralogy to a young ladies' school near Chester, and *Ethics of the Dust*, issued in 1866, gives an idea of how he did his work. The book consists of dialogues between a certain old professor and a number of young girls, whose respective ages vary a good deal, and it exhibits an immense command of geological and crystallographical facts coupled with a complete absence of any definite theory founded upon them. This is, of course, only to be expected of Ruskin,

according to what is known of him. But the moralistic conclusions drawn by him from his observations, the attributions of different virtues and vices to different mineral substances, are as clever as they are unexpected, and as plausible as they are unreasonable. The lecturer shows himself to his audience as a mixture of Sir Charles Lyell, Æsop, Lewis Carroll, and Charles Kingsley, and one would give a good deal to know what the original young ladies thought of him. But of one thing one can be certain, and that is that they found him most fascinating. Indeed, it is a difficult problem to discover how Ruskin, who, as has been said before, could gather round him a staff of lieutenants, but not an army of troops, managed to adapt himself so ably as he did, even for short periods, to audiences as far apart from each other as the Poles,—to Oxford men, Cambridge men, London artisans, military cadets, Manchester merchants, artists' clubs, girls' colleges, and museum trustees. And we suppose the truth is that he had in him a great deal of the character which everybody has agreed to attribute to the Celt, and which very probably does find its most notable development in the Celt,—the character which can be all things to all men while its owner is among them, but has not patience enough to wait for the rise of some sentiment that is universal and identify himself with it, and so regenerate a world. Ruskin, of course, had certain very great principles which he would never cease from advancing, and in whose cause he was patient in the extreme; but these principles were, in the very nature of things, un-



popular; indeed, they were just about as unpopular as true Christianity without its Divine power and authority. Stevenson says of the Master of Ballantrae that he enjoyed the reading of the Bible, but that its solemn exhortations passed high over his head like summer thunder. And the majority of the readers of Ruskin's works rather resemble the Master of Ballantrae in their acceptance of them.

In 1867 there appeared *Time and Tide*, which consists of twenty-five letters addressed to a working man of Sunderland, who had ventured to open a correspondence with Ruskin upon some subject or other. A great Reform agitation was at work in the country at this date, and the questions of Disestablishment, Universal Suffrage, and even the Nationalization of Land were being violently discussed everywhere. That there was a need for reform in some departments of the life of the body politic is certain; but, on the other hand, there was in existence a just and reasonable dread of placing imperial interests in the power of the lowest and least enlightened classes. Ruskin in *Time and Tide* cuts in, as it were, at right angles to the whole controversy, trying to convince his readers that it was being conducted on an entirely different plane from the right one. It is impossible, he would say, to make men moral or even decently honest, or even to make the country externally prosperous,—by Act of Parliament. Let every individual see to it that he at least is not a sham, cumbering a real universe, and then Acts of Parliament will either not be necessary or will come of themselves. Again, while

going as far as Henry George himself in insisting that no private person should derive an income from the land, he differs from him entirely in recommending that the landed gentry should receive incomes from the Government in lieu of rent. Then, as has been said before, he disapproves of large families, especially in the case of people unable to support them, but, for all that, would increase the chances of their occurrence by facilitating early marriages, in which the spouses are to be subsidized for seven years after the wedding-day; as a matter of fact the husband ought not, under this scheme, to be more than twenty-three, nor the bride more than eighteen, while parties whose wedlock has to be deferred ought to be made ashamed of themselves. It will therefore be seen that in *Time and Tide* Ruskin touched some very vital and very delicate matters indeed with no trembling hand. Yet the book contains such trivialities as an attack on the use of tobacco—just the sort of sumptuary polemic of which the author, above all other men, was capable.

Unfortunately, Ruskin's mind had by this time got into a very feverish and disordered state, and some sort of immediate change appeared absolutely necessary. So he set off once more for his beloved Switzerland, the exquisite land of Manfred and William Tell, the land of chaste romance. And once more he visited the city of Geneva, from whose piers so many of the great spirits of literature have in their time listened to the eternal lapping of the waves of Lake Lemman, and once more stood in Morgarten Glen, where "the axe struck down horse

and rider." What an inspiration did this exquisite and changeable genius derive from the Alpine district of Europe ! It was there that he formulated his vast schemes ; it was there that he renewed his faculty of invention ; it was there that he was healed of the wounds inflicted by a callous civilization ; it was there that the good God Himself revealed Himself to him among the circles of the flowers of the mountain, flowers chaste and full of incense.

In this same year, after his return from Switzerland, Ruskin delivered the Rede lecture at Cambridge. His lecture was simply an enlargement in the ornate manner of the sermon in three words which he used as a child to deliver to the household at Herne Hill, "People, be good !" He urged the fellows and tutors to preserve the undergraduates as much as possible from temptation ; but he never seemed to remember that the old powers whereby Alma Mater regulated the lives of youth have practically fallen into desuetude, and that in response to the thunders of the High Table the modern Cambridge man is apt, like the sexton in the *Ingoldsby Legends*, to say no word to indicate a doubt, but to put his thumb unto his nose and to spread his fingers out. To the undergraduates themselves he recommended, as Dr. John Donne might have done, a life of virtue ; whereas most people require not so much a recommendation as strength to follow it through.

Then, in 1868, while travelling a great deal in various parts of the Continent, Ruskin spared time to deliver some of the lectures which go to make the celebrated volume, *Sesame and Lilies*.

In 1869 he published the *Queen of the Air* discourses on Greek myths, or perhaps one should say from Greek myths. This book, which is not equal in style either of his three great first works on the one hand, or to *Sesame and Lilies* and some of the volumes of *Fors Clavigera* on the other, makes a kind of "pot-pourri" of Hellenic religion and Christian Socialism. What effect it can have had on contemporary thought and morals it is hard to estimate; one fears very little. And here the reflection is worth insertion, that while Ruskin is constantly found attacking the Renaissance and all that are concerned therein, he sometimes resembles a Renaissance writer himself, and nowhere more so than in *Queen of the Air*. The men of the Renaissance wished to be classical, to call back the gods and nymphs of the Greek and Roman ages to the world whence they had fled, but at the same time to be Christians. And this is precisely what the author would do in the *Queen of the Air*. Of course a great variety of tendencies show themselves in the work, so that in places one would believe oneself to be reading a mediæval schoolman, one of those who proved the doctrine of the Holy Trinity from the trefoil, or the doctrine of eternal damnation from the existence of the salamander; but, as we say, the Renaissance element predominates.

This brings us to the autumn of 1869, and therefore to an important juncture in the life of Ruskin, for one morning in August a letter came to him, offering him the Slade Lectureship in the University of Oxford, there being a general feeling in that body



that it could not lag behind Cambridge in the public recognition of so great a master, especially as he was a Christ Church man. The offer was accepted readily, very probably because Ruskin, apart from all questions of honour and glory, felt the want of some fixed appointment or profession, and furthermore, saw that here there was a chance of impregnating the future governors and interpreters of England, while their minds were yet flexible, with those ideas which he found it so difficult to make generally acceptable. So once more, as a matter of fact in February 1870, Ruskin entered Oxford, to take up his duties there. The Ashmolean Museum Hall having been found far too small for the crowd, recourse was had to the magnificent Sheldonian Theatre. And there, before an audience of as composite a character as is likely to be found in Oxford—there, in the noble crescent from which the voices of its great architect and its pious founder seem to speak in echoes to the imagination, he delivered one of the most exalted and individual orations that it has been the lot of the ancient University to hear. Whatever contemporary criticism had expected, whatever the Jeremiahs of the time had said in advance—it may at this date justly be recorded of Ruskin that he came, saw, and conquered. He was to be given one of the best seats in the academic chamber: but he was not, as some of his friends expected, to be made chilly, cynical, and less of an enthusiast, as so many reformers are when they become professors; on the contrary, he was to dominate Oxford more than Oxford was to dominate

him. As for the lectures of 1870, they are to be found in the three volumes, *Lectures on Art*, *Aratra Pentelici*, and *Michael Angelo and Tintoret*, all issued with a very short interval between the class-room and the publishers.

But while Ruskin was reaping such official laurels at Oxford, sad changes were occurring at Denmark Hill. The affectionate cousin, Joan Agnew, married young Arthur Severn, and so the great, sumptuous house lost her presence for ever. Seven years she had resided there, a sister to the critic and a daughter to his mother, and both of them had come to look upon her as such. Whether Ruskin ever thought of entering into a yet closer relationship with her is matter for speculation; if he did, then he must have regretted the day when he met the genial Joseph Severn in the stairway of a Roman lodging; but it is pleasant to observe that, either having no such thought, and consequently no such regret, or else, conquering them, he accepted the inevitable, and instead of drawing himself away from the married pair drew himself closer to them, so that they were with him very frequently up to the last scene of his long life.

But now another gap was made in the little circle in the London suburb; in fact, that circle was to be dissolved altogether. In the month of December Mrs. Ruskin died, and her loss was inestimable. Most assuredly this blow, terrible and yet not unreasonable or unexpected, must have made the walls of the illusion of the world quiver before the eyes that had watched their wondrous tapestries so long.

Ruskin was not an old man, and yet person after person, with whom his happiness had seemed to be bound up inseparably, had disappeared. Marriage, divorce, and death, the three things that cause so much controversy among us modern civilized people, had removed from his side sweethearts, wife, and parents respectively; so that, at an unusually early age, he was becoming stranded and alone. How hollow to him, as he sat in that quiet, dark chamber, must have seemed the cheers of the halls of Manchester, and the applause that could shake the Sheldonian Theatre. The framed addresses, the letters in his desk from foreign academies, might now have been the tale of some ancient wars. As for the Turners in the dining-room, each of which his mother's Puritanism had darkened with a black cloth on Sundays—they might always be darkened now. What a remarkable thing it is that, while each new birth into our circle may fail to quicken our interest in life, each retiral from it undoubtedly quickens our interest in death! Strange trait of man! That he should dwell longer in thought on what appals than on what pleases!

Meanwhile, we cannot wonder if the brain of Ruskin was weakened after those dark days; we cannot wonder if, in an agony of unjustified remorse, he blamed himself as one having lived the "absorbing, overgrown life of the intellect," to the detriment of the virtues; we cannot wonder if he kept looking upon himself as a new Faust, left with Dead Sea fruit in his hand, and with several unfallen Marguerites spirited far from him into heavenly Paradises or

earthly ones. Assuredly, the passing away of his mother must, even though it had done nothing else, have loosened his hold upon human things; and really, in contemporary life, there seemed little to comfort him; a reaction seemed to have overtaken his efforts for the purification of Art, and for the establishment of a Holy Republic in England; the Franco-German War had cast a terrific shade over the Continent; and in Lancashire, as in America, men were reaping the whirlwind of a vanished strife. If he had opened the window of his mother's room, as perhaps he did open it, and looked out into the night, he would have seen the glare of furnaces and of windows in the distance, signifying the arid, industrial Philistine existence that he, like Matthew Arnold, hated so much—he would have heard the shrieks of trains, rushing like red serpents from one darkness to another, and thought of the refugees going home across the Channel to find their great capital ruined by shot and shell. And even if he had tried to set his thoughts upon the approaching Christmas, he could not but feel how far, during the last few years, he had drifted from his mother's beliefs. What between her actual death and the miserable trains of imagination aroused by it, the year must have ended very sadly for Ruskin. And from this date onwards there came intervals in his career when the Universe seemed to get upon his nerves, as it were, and a kind of vague resentment occupy his mind against a race of beings that could not or would not understand him or his sorrows.

Again, the only other important event which con-



cerned the Slade Professor, occurring in this year of 1871, was his acquisition of Brantwood, on Lake Coniston, in his beloved Cumberland. Brantwood was to be the place in which his days should end, in due season, not altogether unhappily. It was and is situated in the midst of the everlasting hills, in the heart of the vast, inhuman Nature, wherefrom men curiously can derive the most profound consolation for purely human sorrows, when human things fail.

In 1872 he delivered in Oxford the lectures which are to be found in *The Eagle's Nest* and *Ariadne Florentina*, and issued *Sesame and Lilies* in book form.

*Sesame and Lilies* ought to be made the subject of very special reference for various reasons. Perhaps of all the works that bear the name of the author, it has the widest circulation, or, at least, is most read: it is more moderate in price than the three mighty books that made his name, and it is more comprehensible, coherent, and generally interesting than *The Queen of the Air*, *Ethics of the Dust*, and *Fors Clavigera*; while the title, though often criticized, has just as much relevancy and import as most of his titles have. Again, while occupying itself with such questions as the best and truest education, and how to gain it, it has a good deal to say on the relations of the two sexes in the part headed "Queens' Gardens." Indeed, many suppose him to have settled, not the "Sex Question"—for nobody exactly knows of what that question consists—but what the respective functions of man and woman

are in social, moral, and economic life. His theory of the rights of woman, as we can gather it from *Sesame and Lilies*, is as follows:—

While the work of man is conquest, that of woman is order. She governs what he makes possible, the secret, or perhaps it would be better to say, the inner life of the palace in the garden, the home. Impurity and violence, to whose temptations the husband is presumed to be always exposed and sometimes a victim while he is abroad, ought to perish at the steps of the palace. Woman, she herself being carefully isolated from an evil world, ought to present to her husband a continual white ideal, whose spectacle cannot fail to brace him against the next temptation that assails him. Woman, therefore, having in her power the mortal bodies of children and the immortal souls of both children and men, that is to say, within certain limits, must be most carefully educated for her office. No expense and no trouble must be spared in making her wise, modest, true, kind, pleasant, chaste; just as man is brave, free, courteous, charitable, and honourable.<sup>1</sup> At the same time she must be excluded from business life and legislation as much as possible; because these things might defile her and injure the white ideal, so that man would be in a desperate case, having to go without it, and, even if they did not defile her, would tend to impair the force and efficacy of home-life.

The words are ours; and yet we do not think that any reader of *Sesame and Lilies* will complain that we have not expressed Ruskin's views fairly. Yet

<sup>1</sup> He is not; but all this refers to an ideal state.

one thing we have forgotten, and that is his denunciation of idle gentlewomen and of all females who consider domestic duties servile and degrading.

Now, having inserted what we had omitted, we would suggest that a temperate criticism might take the following line. It might agree that, so long as woman continues in her present condition of muscular weakness, it is wise to leave conquest to men; it might agree that a wife should plan and direct the affairs of her husband's home as orderly as possible; it might agree that the more woman is a white ideal, the better for the world, so long as she is to be an ideal at all; but it would certainly point out that in the most enlightened countries woman not only insists that impurity and violence shall not enter the home, but more and more refuses to live with a husband who trips over their temptations, even occasionally, in the outer streets; it would admit that it is very desirable that woman should be educated to be wise, modest, true, kind, pleasant, chaste, but would insist that the wiser, the more modest, the truer, the kinder, the more pleasant, the chaster she is, the more desirable does her presence in business life and legislation become, and the less harm will she get from either one or the other.

Such a temperate criticism as this would be the opinions contained in the *Subjection of Women* of John Stuart Mill; and in his name something may be said in answer to the last point in Ruskin's case: a point still left unanswered—namely, that, even if business life and legislation did not defile woman,

they would tend to impair the force and efficacy of home-life. It may be said that if the home-life is the home-life of a glorified housekeeper, of woman, in no sense inferior intellectually to her husband, except in so far as is due to want of training, having the brain that God has given her gradually atrophied in a store-room, the sooner the force and efficacy of home-life are impaired the better. But, taking the ideal home-life, and it would be only fair to Ruskin to do so, it may be said that home-life is only one branch of existence, just as the bearing of children is the exercise of only one set of functions ; and that it is as unfair that a whole sex, half the world, in fact a whole race, with myriads of varied powers and intelligences, should only be permitted to develop along this one branch of their existence and keep using one set of organs, as that every man should be expected to be a chartered accountant. Home-life and motherhood, Mill would say, are excellent things, but, apart from the fact that many women who make these excellent things their main objects could spare ten minutes to record a vote, or ten months to write a novel, there are a vast number of women who cannot make home-life and motherhood their main objects, for whom careers ought to be provided, if they shall be found to be competent.

Finally, let it be said that in *Sesame and Lilies* Ruskin shows the world another facet of that mind of his, which has a hundred facets, like a jewel ; and that this particular facet is his Conservative one, reflecting the views on the sexes and their concerns of Solomon, Dante, and Spenser respectively.



## THIRD QUARTER.

ECONOMIC AND MORALISTIC.

(1860-84).

### CHAPTER X.

So many of Ruskin's books are either bound volumes of lectures (delivered, in some cases, long before their public issue), or else bound volumes of pamphlets, letters, or monographs, written at intervals over a long period, that his bibliography is rather a troublesome matter. Nowhere is it more troublesome than in the case of *Fors Clavigera*, which took fourteen years to complete, coming out like a journal, a part every so many weeks. One naturally objects to doubling in a biography, as the old-fashioned novelists did in their novels, that is to say breaking one's flowing chronology and spoiling the periodic succession of the chapters. Yet the question is whether to deal with *Fors Clavigera* under the events of 1871 or of 1884, or whether to discuss the more prominent letters as they appear in their due season. The first plan pleases the writer, the second the reader, and the third neither. However, we must double so far as to say that Mr. George Allen, a man

who was destined to identify himself to a great extent with Ruskin's schemes and ideas, published the first number of *Fors Clavigera* in January 1871. The book consists of addresses to working men (giving a fairly wide sense to the term), and is only to cost them "the price of two pints of beer" per month. It is commenced as a socialistic work to help people out of the Slough of Despond, in which Ruskin, like Carlyle, supposes them to be continually wallowing; but it becomes practically a mass of digressions, and ultimately resembles a mixture of *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, Pepys' *Diary*, and Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius*. It is encyclopædic in its range of allusions, but in nothing else; and perhaps the only single coherent thread of writing in it relates to the conception and formation of the Company of St. George; and even this thread has to be picked up here and there, and then withdrawn and regarded as a whole. Mr. Frederic Harrison thinks that there is a fixed and definite purpose running through the book, namely the revelation of a fantastic and rich mind. Personally, we admit that *Fors Clavigera* does reveal, in the minutest manner, such a mind, but we doubt if the revelation is the result of a fixed and definite purpose at all. The only benefits to be obtained from reading the book are incidental: the author set out to elevate the crowd of our toilers, and to cheer the hearts of those of moderate means; whereas he has amused the literary man and interested the aristocratic radical. As for the actual labourer, experience proved that, as a rule, he preferred his two pints of beer to the intangible joys offered to him instead.

The title of the work is a curious and seemingly irrelevant one. "Fors" means "chance" in one place, "fate" in another, and (through "destiny," or "fate" plus "power") "force" in another. "Fors" is sometimes supposed to carry a "key," sometimes supposed to carry a "club," and sometimes supposed to carry a "nail." It must be admitted that Ruskin makes an occasional ghostly attempt at keeping within the range of his title; but in the very nature of things it is a failure. For instance, he introduces Theseus as an example of that knighthood in which he would have us believe a little more than we do, choosing Theseus, as far as we can see, mainly because he had a club, and was guided into a maze by Ariadne, with a thread, which was practically as good as a key.

The Franco-German war was raging at the time when the first of the letters appeared; and so Ruskin keeps constantly introducing his readers to that terrible struggle, as well as to the Commune<sup>1</sup> in

<sup>1</sup> The letters are full of a burning sympathy with France; and one of the few passages in the book, where the author gets back to his old rhetoric, is the following one from the eighth letter, the tenth page of it: he is trying so far to make it clear that the Communists are not the only people to be blamed for the present miseries in Paris, but that the wickedness of the politico-economical system under which they have been brought up is largely to be censured.

"Alas, of these divided races, of whom one was appointed to teach and guide the other, which has indeed sinned deepest,—the unteaching or the untaught? which now are guiltiest,—those who perish, or those who forget?"

"Ouvrier and petroleuse, they are gone their way to their death.

Paris, and the relief funds to which he himself was a large subscriber. He warns his too eager Socialistic readers against confusing Anarchy, such as is raging by the banks of the Seine, with Liberty, such as nowhere exists in its ideal form as yet. As has been stated in the last chapter, the air was full of trouble in the early seventies: many people looked for a veritable Armageddon at no distant date, while others expected to see a war in Great Britain between Capital and Labour; in the theological world also things were looking very dark, as they look now, largely owing to the fuller revelation of the great facts of Evolution and of Palæontology.

Ruskin tries to fill men's minds with a sense of the reality of the horrors of bloodshed, as seen across the Channel, and to temper the extreme opinions on home politics, which he supposes, and rightly, to be theirs. As for the religious, or rather the theological difficulties, he does not, properly speaking, meet them at all, contenting himself with an attack on scientists for their want of charity to one another, and a joke upon the Darwinian theory, jesting with his readers as persons now descended from sea-slime. Again, he often goes to the daily newspaper for inspiration; he reads of the death of Colonel James Fiske, the

But for these the Virgin of France shall yet unfold the oriflamme above their graves, and lay their blanched lilies on their smirched dust. Yes, and for these great Charles shall rouse his Roland, and bid him put ghostly trump to lip, and breathe a point of war; and the helmed Pucelle shall answer with a woodnote of Domremy; yes, and for these the Louis they mocked, like his Master, shall raise holy hands, and pray God's peace."



famous New York alderman, and manages to spend a great deal of space and time in comparing him with Sir John Hawkwood, the Anglo-Italian adventurer.

The report of the death of a young woman in a cellar in the east end of London furnishes him with material for an attack, and, as we think, an unjust attack on John Stuart Mill. This young woman, he says, had "followed a more lucrative occupation than that of nursing the baby."<sup>1</sup> She was so far a disciple of Mill, in that she was not content with matrimony and motherhood. Then, in another place, he asks what Mill would have thought of the Madonna,<sup>2</sup> who was not ashamed to nurse the Child. From this he flits on to a sermon on the Nativity, in which he points out that it is the Magi, the wise men, that are spoken of as having made adoration, not the shepherds that were in the fields; let our men of learning take note. Then, in another letter, he shows a kind of humorous anger touching the case of a steam-plough which some wilful farmers were following, over a farm near Brantwood. Such a procession, he would hold, is

<sup>1</sup> He does not use the word "prostitution" here; but, as he says later on, "your daughters abused to death, as they will be" when we have the gospel according to Mr. Mill, or words to that effect, we have internal evidence of what he meant.

<sup>2</sup> The following is a quotation from the fourteenth and fifteenth pages of the twelfth letter of *Fors* :—

"They [the persons that Ruskin is now condemning] probably would have thought of the Madonna with Mr. John Stuart Mill [*Principles of Political Economy*] that there was scarcely any means open to her of gaining a livelihood, except as a wife and mother; and that women who prefer that occupation might justifiably adopt

very unlike "Chaucer's carolling company," who followed Love. Whereupon he launches out against the use of steam-power, except as a last resource, that is to say, when neither man-power, nor wind-power, nor water-power is available. In the company of St. George there will be neither steam-plough, nor steam-horse, nor steam-boat. "Please God," he says, "we will have some riding, not as jockeys ride, and some sailing, not as steam-kettles sail."

At considerable expense he had woodcuts from the frescoes of Giotto introduced as illustrations, while on the title-page of each number he had printed some flower from the "Spring" of Botticelli. Of Giotto and his creations he has a good deal to say from time to time; and he tells the life-story of Botticelli, how he did the finest goldsmith's work that ever was, and the most exquisite and honest painting, and yet died a pauper, or next door to it.

it, but, that there should be no option, no other *carrière* possible, for the great majority of women, except in the humbler departments of life, is one of those social injustices that call loudest for remedy.

"The poor girl of Nazareth had less option than most; and with her weak, 'Be it unto me as Thou wilt,' fell so far below the modern type of independent womanhood, that one cannot wonder at any degree of contempt felt for her by British Protestants. Some people, nevertheless, were meant at the time to think otherwise of her."

It will be easily observed that Ruskin's reasoning is here neither fair nor satisfactory. To hold up our modern political Liberals as persons with a bias against the Mother of God is too easy a way of gaining a victory, and reminds us of the question put by a Presbyterian minister to a young man who saw the truth of Evolution, "Are you for Christ or Darwin?"

Now all the while that *Fors Clavigera* was appearing the author was not only carefully fulfilling his duties as Slade Professor of Art in Oxford, but exceeding them in some very practical ways. For one thing, he had come to have more and more respect for manual labour, although he himself had never had to perform any. He was never tired of pointing to the examples of Hercules and Theseus and Cincinnatus, all three of them gentlemen and more than gentlemen, and yet hard workers with their hands. He had long ago warned and denounced the idle ladies of fashion, and now he turned his attention to persons of the other sex. Of course it was hardly fair of him to talk as if the great bulk of the young men of our upper classes were polite loafers, least of all, as if the undergraduates who attended his lectures at Oxford were polite loafers; polite loafers there were and are plenty in Oxford, but it is inconceivable that such men should have become his pupils. He put himself in the position of the clergyman who scolds his congregation for lax churchgoing, instead of the crowd that are walking outside. He never seemed to realize that it is hardly possible for any ordinary man who wishes to take any kind of degree at all, within a reasonable time, to be a complete idler. However, he was quite right in holding that there could be no disgrace in manual labour, and if he succeeded in convincing a number of other people on this point, the enterprise upon which he now embarked was not altogether a failure. This enterprise was nothing else than the construction of a new road to the

village of Hinksey, the place so pathetically mentioned in Matthew Arnold's "Thyrsis." There seems to have been much need for a new road, and Ruskin called for volunteers from among his students. We fear that the motive which appealed to the majority of those who answered the call was not one of principle, but of novelty: some reading men felt the need of a regular exercise of some kind, while some athletes had got *blasés*, and wished to vary the exercise which they already enjoyed. But all began with a right good will, under the personal supervision of Ruskin, and some practical man or other, and succeeded quite as well as could have been expected, in the face of a great deal of ridicule from some of the better classes, and a little hostility from some of the lower classes, who doubtless thought that some bread was being taken out of their own mouths. For some reason or other, the example of the gallant roadmakers has not been followed in any literal way, and possibly this fact was largely responsible for some of Ruskin's dejection in later years. But the unforeseen influence of the affair has been tolerably wide; for example, it affected Arnold Tonybee<sup>1</sup> to the extent of making him conclude that it must be a better thing to get some visible work of philanthropy completed on this little globe than to write the ablest book, or make the most eloquent oration.

We should like to know what Charles Kingsley and William Morris, Ruskin's compeers in philanthropic schemes, said about the matter. Perhaps

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Japp on Tonybee, in *Good Men and True*.



the following quotation from the *Yeast* of Kingsley, written, curiously enough, as far back as 1848, may be allowed to speak for the author :—

“His (Lancelot Smith’s) purse was empty, and so was his stomach; and as for asking assistance of his uncle, it was returning like the dog to his vomit. So one day he settled all his bills with his last shilling, tied up his remaining clothes in a bundle, and stoutly stepped forth into the street to find a job—to hold a horse, if nothing better offered; when, behold! on the threshold he met Barnakill himself.

“‘Whither away?’ said that strange personage. ‘I was just going to call on you.’

“‘To earn my bread by the labour of my hands. So our fathers all began.’

“‘And so their sons must all end. Do you want work?’

“‘Yes, if you have any.’

“‘Follow me, and carry a trunk home from a shop to my lodgings.’

“‘He strode off, with Lancelot after him; entered a mathematical instrument maker’s shop in the neighbouring street, and pointed out a heavy corded case to Lancelot, who, with the assistance of the shopman, got it on his shoulders; and trudging forth through the streets after his employer, who walked before him, silent and unregarding, felt himself for the first time in his life in the same situation as nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand of Adam’s descendants, and discovered somewhat to his satisfaction that when he could once rid his mind of its old superstition that every one was looking at him, it mattered very little whether the burden carried were a deal trunk or a Downing Street despatch-box.”

In 1872, that is, about the time of the road-making, Ruskin issued the *Eagle’s Nest*, another book with an irrelevant title. It refers to eagles’ nests among other things, but it ends in dissertations upon everything. One of the most interesting questions it touches is the question of the nude in art. His

opinion is that "so much of the nude body, as, in the daily life of the nation may be seen with reverence, with modesty, and with delight; so much, and no more, ought to be shown by the national arts, either of Painting or of Sculpture." The introduction of the clause, "in the daily life of the nation,"<sup>1</sup> is needless and meaningless; for indecency is indecency, whether in the daily life of the nation or out of it: a lady in a zinc bath, practically the only place where our age reveals the nude, forms part of the daily life of the nation in many houses every morning, and her portrait might hurt some feelings as much as a picture of Aphrodite rising from the sea. As for reverence, no dozen minds at a conference will agree as to how much can be seen with reverence; and as for modesty and delight, most of the visitors in our galleries look modest, though few delighted. As for Sculpture, considered separately from Painting, it will not be easy to put into effect therein the ideas which one can read between Ruskin's lines, for clothes, especially of the type occurring in the daily life of the nation, seldom show to advantage in statues. Finally, it is a strange thought that of all the products of Evolution, Man is the only one demanding, like the head of Medusa, a perennial veil. If only some one would invent a more artistic one!

<sup>1</sup> Personally, we think that scenes from the daily life of the nation are the very ones where the nude ought not to be shown, as in almost no such scene can it excite either reverence, modesty, or delight. Classical or exotic scenes, here excluded, are the very places for the nude. But Ruskin seems to contradict himself in another part of his writings.

Turning to Ruskin's private life, we come, in this year of 1872, to a terrible crisis. Woman was again the disturbing element. The truth is that ever since 1858 Ruskin had been in the habit of corresponding intermittently with Miss Rose La Touche, one of his young pupils, that is to say one of his young pupils in 1858. Between 1858 and 1869 they had hardly seen each other at all, but after 1869 they appear to have met fairly frequently. In 1871, or in 1872, and almost to a certainty after the marriage of Joan Agnew, Ruskin asked Rose to marry him. After due consideration she refused his request. And whereas, as it has been generally thought, one of the reasons why Euphemia Gray found the few years that she spent with her husband so irksome was that she was a brilliant woman of the world, and he a pious recluse, the reason given by Rose La Touche for her own refusal to join her life with Ruskin's furnishes us, though not with an exact opposite, at least with a case very different: she refused to become Mrs. Ruskin because she considered herself a pious evangelical and him a brilliant freethinker, and held that marriage could be no more marriage unless the married were at one on points of religious doctrine. One fears that, if this view were universally taken in the twentieth century, very few weddings would occur, since no two people appear to think alike. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine John Ruskin, who was constantly attacking men of science such as Tyndall, Huxley, Haeckel, and Spencer, being himself blamed for heresy. The truth must have been that it was not any real want of ortho-

doxy but the want of a particular form of orthodoxy, Calvinistic Evangelicalism, that repelled Rose La Touche.

Meanwhile, the refusal did him an immense deal of harm, adding, as it did, to a line of sorrows—political, social, religious, and domestic, and seeming to be denial to him, on the part of the Most High, of his last hope of union with any person of the other sex. Herschel, speaking on the eve of the discovery of the planet Uranus, says of the invisible globe: "We have felt its movements trembling upon the far-reaching line of our analysis, with a certainty hardly inferior to ocular demonstration"; and Ruskin's biographer can almost speak in similar terms of the distortions produced, by the secret trouble touching Rose La Touche, in the mind and writings of the great author between 1870 and 1880.

In 1875 she was known to be lying very seriously ill, and Ruskin, pocketing any wounded pride that he had, sent to her, imploring that he might see her. Her reply was a question: did he love God more than he loved her? To this he answered that he could not say so; and he made the reply, either because he thought to satisfy her thus, as though she had been the third lady in Browning's poem, "Which<sup>1</sup>?" or, as is far more probable, because he was too honest to deny what was really the

<sup>1</sup> "Which?" is a poem in which three ladies talk to a priest, the first telling him that her lover must love her next to his life; the second, that her lover must love her next to his God; the third, that her lover must love her more than his God.



case. But at all events the answer seemed to damp his request altogether, for she now refused to let him come nigh her ; and her refusal probably hastened her own end, insomuch that she died that very year. Her death was, as many think, a worse blow to him than any previous bereavement, whether by death or by something else, because, as we have said, it was his last chance gone of the highest human bliss, or at least his penultimate chance. Bunyan's famous sentence, "Then down fell I like a bird that is shot from the top of a tree," might be quoted of Ruskin, for his condition became very desperate. Just about the time of her rejection of his love-suit, he had had periods of what must have been almost madness, and the wonder is how he managed to deliver the lectures for 1872 and the spring of 1873, which must be recorded, and are to be found in *Val d'Arno*, *Love's Meinie*, and *The Art of England*, all published in 1873. But in 1875 and 1876 he had still worse periods, when half his genius and all his religious faith went from him like clouds. His state was analogous to the state in which the late Robert Buchanan<sup>1</sup> found himself after the death of Mrs. Buchanan ; but while Buchanan was turned permanently into an Agnostic by his loss, after praying for several days and receiving no answer, and challenging all there is of God and Christianity to come to his aid, now or never—Ruskin became an Agnostic only for a time. Indeed, there are objections to the idea of his being an Agnostic for any time at all, however much he may

<sup>1</sup> See *Life of Robert Buchanan*, by Harriet Jay.

have parted with his old religious faith; and the chief of these objections is that he took to attending Spiritualistic "seances," and did actually meet with one or two mediums who claimed to be introducing him to the soul of Rose La Touche. Agnosticism and Spiritualism do not usually go together. Yet it is a remarkable thing that one who ought to know speaks of Ruskin's seeing, or imagining that he saw, on Christmas Day 1876, his lost love appear to him in the form of St. Ursula, a saint whose life he had been studying feverishly for some time past, and, further, of his (Ruskin's) believing thereafter that immortality, and the hope of it, were now restored to him; this is a remarkable thing, for, though it may well be doubted whether Ruskin ever saw any such vision as is described, it is quite clear that he would not have spoken of such a restoration<sup>1</sup> unless there had been one, for men may generally be trusted to describe their beliefs accurately: while before there was this restoration there must have been a loss, it being contrary to reason that one should have restored what he has not missed; so that it would seem that there is, after all, something to be said in favour of the theory that, between the death of Rose in 1875 and Christmas Day 1876, Ruskin was, at the least, next door to an Agnostic. And though, during the eighteen months or so of an interval, he may con-

<sup>1</sup> Subjectively—that is, not as a fact but as a belief. There is an immense difference between belief and knowledge; but a man who earnestly believes that he is immortal will be as happy as though he knew it.

ceivably have written in an orthodox and anti-scientific vein, it might well be by means of the "mere machine<sup>1</sup> strength and momentum" of past habits and teaching.

Again, from 1871 to 1876, Ruskin had taken part in a number of works of experimental philanthropy which are well worthy of mention. For one thing, finding the well-known worker, Miss Octavia Hill, in financial difficulties with regard to her scheme for model dwellings in London, he took the ultimate responsibilities of the enterprise, for a certain period at least, into his own hands, within certain well-defined limits, and with certain nominal conditions regarding the repayment to him of probable future losses, and having, so to speak, floated her from among the shoals, allowed her to conduct affairs and to collect rents, as she thought proper. Then he started a shop, where pure tea was sold—a model, and a working model, of the great Government stores which he advocates in *Unto This Last*—stores where a man who chose to pay the Government price could be sure of getting bread that was bread, ale that was ale, and work that was work. He also organized a gang of crossing-sweepers, so as to put some of the unemployed to some useful work, but did not succeed as he had expected. And all the while he had managed, in spite of his private sorrow, to issue his *Fors Clavigera* with tolerable regularity, and to sustain a correspondence with all manner of

<sup>1</sup> An adapted quotation from Dr. Thomas Arnold in Cassell's *History of England*, vol. ix.; he is speaking of a charge being continued by the Confederates at Gettysburg, after they had lost.

reformers, sending advice to such young enthusiasts as Arnold Toynbee and refusals of subscriptions to unwitting secretaries of organizations for the restoral of ancient buildings. Besides this, he had been much occupied with the design and formation of his company of St. George, a miniature community that deserves a chapter to itself.

But during the years 1875 and 1876 everything, or almost everything, went to the wall, and but for the unremitting care exercised by the Severns and other friends, matters might have gone very badly indeed. He appears to have had an attack of brain fever in 1876 at Assisi, where he had gone for a holiday, and another one, which had like to have been fatal, in 1877, at home.



## THIRD QUARTER.

ECONOMIC AND MORALISTIC.

(1860-84).

### CHAPTER XI.

ST. GEORGE'S COMPANY.

ST. GEORGE'S COMPANY is first outlined in *Fors Clavigera* in the early 'seventies; but there is good reason for believing that the conception of it originated in France: we mean that Ruskin brought the idea with him from France. At the age of sixteen, that is to say on the first occasion of his showing a tendency to fall into a decline, his parents had, as it will be remembered, taken him to the Continent; the little party had travelled to Paris, *viâ* Boulogne, and on the way they had visited Abbeville. In the first volume of *Præterita* we read as follows:—

“About the moment in the forenoon, when the modern fashionable traveller, intent on Paris, Nice, and Monaco, and started by the morning mail from Charing Cross, has a little recovered himself from the qualms of his crossing and the irritation of fighting for seats at Boulogne, and begins to look at his watch to see how near he is to the buffet of Amiens, he is apt to be baulked and worried

by the train's useless stop at one inconsiderable station lettered Abbeville. As the carriage gets into motion again, he may see, if he cares to lift his eyes for an instant from his newspaper, two square towers, with a curiously attached bit of traceried arch, dominant over the poplars and osiers of the marshy level he is traversing.

"Such glimpse is probably all he will ever wish to get of them; and I scarcely know how far I can make even the most sympathetic reader understand their power over my own life.

"The country town in which they are central, once, like Croy, a mere monk's and peasant's refuge—so for some time called 'Refuge'—among the swamps of Somme, received about the year 650 the name of 'Abbatis Villa'—Abbotsford I had liked to have written: house and village, I suppose, we may rightly say—as the chief dependence of the great monastery founded by St. Riquier at his native place on the hillside five miles east of the present town. Concerning which saint I translate from the *Dict. des Sciences Ecclesiastiques* what it may perhaps be well for the reader, in present political junctures, to remember for more weighty reasons than any arising out of such interest as he may take in my poor little nascent personality.

"St. Riquier, in Latin *Sanctus Richarius*, born in the village of Centula, at two leagues from Abbeville, was so touched by the piety of two holy priests of Ireland whom he had hospitably received that he also embraced *la penitence*. Being ordained priest, he devoted himself to preaching, and so passed into England. Then returning into Ponthieu he became, by God's help, powerful in work and word in leading the people to repentance. He preached at the court of Dagobert, and a little while after that prince's death founded the monastery which bore his name, and another, called Forest-Moutier, in the wood of Crecy, where he ended his life and penitence.

"In 1600 the town, then familiarly called Faithful Abbeville, contained forty thousand souls, living in great unity among themselves, of a marvellous frankness, fearing to do wrong to their neighbour, the women modest, honest, full of faith and charity, and adorned with a goodness and beauty *toute innocente*; the noblesse

numerous, hardy, and adroit in arms; the masterships (maistries) of arts and trades, with excellent workers in every profession, under sixty-four Mayor-bannerets, who are the chiefs of the trades, and elect the Mayor of the city, who is an independent Home Ruler, 'de grand probité, d'autorité, et sans reproche,' aided by four 'eschevins' of the present and four of the past year; having authority of justice, police, and war, and right to keep the weights and measures true and unchanged, and to punish those who abuse them, or sell by false weight or measure, or sell anything without the town's mark on it. Moreover, the town contained, besides the great church of St. Wulfram, thirteen parish churches.

"For Abbeville, which is the preface and interpretation of Rouen, I was ready on that fifth of June, and felt that here was entrance for me into immediately healthy labour and joy.

"For here I saw that art (of its local kind), religion, and present human life were yet in perfect harmony. There were no dead six days and dismal seventh in those sculptured churches; there was no beadle to lock me out of them, or pew-shutter to shut me in. I might haunt them, fancying myself a ghost; peep round their pillars like Rob Roy; kneel in them, and scandalize nobody; draw in them and disturb none.

"Outside the faithful old town gathered itself, and nestled under their buttresses, like a brood beneath the mother's wings; the quiet, uninjurious aristocracy of the newer town opened into silent streets, between self-possessed and hidden dignities of dwelling, each with its courtyard and richly trellised garden. The commercial square, with the main street of traverse, consisted of uncompetitive shops, such as were needful, of the native wares: cloth and hosiery spun, woven, and knitted within the walls; cheese of neighbouring Neuchâtel; fruit of their own gardens, bread from the fields above the green coteaux; meat of their herds untainted of American tin; smith's work of sufficient scythe and ploughshare, hammered on the open anvil; groceries dainty, the coffee generally roasting odoriferously in the street, before the door; for the modistes—well, perhaps, a bonnet or two from Paris, the rest, wholesome dress for peasant and dame of Ponthieu. Above the prosperous, serenely busy and beneficent shop, the old dwelling-house of its ancestral

masters; pleasantly carved, proudly roofed, keeping its place, and order, and recognized function, unflinching, unenlarging for centuries."

Now there is good reason to believe that the germ of the conception of the Company of St. George was sown in the brain of Ruskin, when he thus visited Abbeville in 1835. Of course the paragraphs that we have quoted were not actually written till about 1892; and it may be that we are mistaking the effect for the cause, and that it is in the light of his experience of the Company of St. George that the author of *Præterita* is investing Abbeville, and the foundations of St. Riquier, with qualities which they had not really possessed for him half a century previously. But there is good reason to believe as we have said, for the Company, not perhaps as it came to exist, but as it is outlined in *Fors Clavigera*, is exceedingly like a tiny Abbeville, such as Abbeville was in the days of the good St. Riquier, and even in much later ones.

Ruskin began by asking his readers to subscribe to a fund, in which he himself put a good deal of money, and which was to be managed by a board of trustees. The eighth letter of *Fors Clavigera* includes the following programme:—

"As soon as the fund reaches any sufficient amount, the trustees shall buy with it any kind of land offered them at just price in Britain—rock, moor, marsh, or sea-shore, it matters not what, so it be British ground, and secured to us. Then we will ascertain the absolute best that can be made of every acre. We will first examine what flowers and herbs it naturally bears; every wholesome flower that it will grow shall be sown in its wild places, and every kind of fruit tree that can prosper; and arable and pasture



land extended by every expedient of tillage, with humble and simple cottage dwellings under faultless sanitary regulation. Whatever piece of land we begin work upon we shall treat thoroughly at once, putting unlimited manual labour on it, until we have every foot of it under as strict care as a flower-garden; and the labourers shall be paid sufficient, unchanging wages, and their children educated compulsorily, in agricultural schools inland, and naval schools by the sea, the indispensable first condition of such education being that the boys learn either to ride or to sail, the girls to spin, weave, or sew, and, at a proper age, to cook all ordinary food exquisitely; the youth of both sexes to be disciplined daily in strictest practice of vocal music; and, for morality, to be taught gentleness to all brute creatures, finished courtesy to each other, to speak truth with rigid care, and to obey orders with the precision of slaves. Then, as they get older, they are to learn the natural history of the place they live in, to know Latin, boys and girls both, and the history of five cities—Athens, Rome, Venice, Florence, and London.”

Then, in another letter in *Fors Clavigera*, he intimates to his disciples that some one has given him a present of a few acres of land in Worcestershire, and that some one else has offered some ground in Scotland. He also points out that he himself has put some seven thousand pounds into the enterprise, and begs to acknowledge receipt of some subscriptions that look very small beside this sum. And in the early 'seventies the Company of St. George became a living thing, that was to last for nearly twenty years; in fact, it came into existence before all the ink on the programme was dry. A few Companions of St. George were got together, and set to work under conditions reasonably like those imagined by Ruskin; and, furthermore, did actually live very much as he desired. The scope

of this biography will not permit of a detailed account of the company and their doings, but we must record that they had a bureaucracy<sup>1</sup> from the very start, soon acquired a creed, and meant to have a coinage. The creed, which was written in 1875, and which every prospective companion had not only to accept, but to copy out, to make sure that he read and appreciated what he was putting his hand to, seems to us well worth quoting:—

“I.—I trust in the Living God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things and creatures visible and invisible. I trust in the kindness of His law, and the goodness of His work. And I will serve Him, and keep His law, and see His work, while I live.

“II.—I trust in the nobleness of human nature, in the majesty of its faculties, the fulness of its mercy, and the joy of its love. And I will strive to love my neighbour as myself, and, even when I cannot, will act as if I did.

“III.—I will labour, with such strength and opportunity as God gives me, for my own daily bread; and all that my hand finds to do, I will do with all my might.

“IV.—I will not deceive, or cause to be deceived, any human being for my gain or pleasure; nor hurt, or cause to be hurt, any human being for my gain or pleasure; nor rob, or cause to be robbed, any human being for my gain or pleasure.

“V.—I will not kill nor hurt any gentle creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing, but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life, and guard and perfect all natural beauty upon the earth.

“VI.—I will strive to raise my own body and soul daily into higher powers of duty and happiness; not in rivalry and contention with others, but for the help, delight, and honour of others, and for the joy and peace of my own life.

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<sup>1</sup> “We will have no liberty, but instant obedience to known law.”—*Fors.*

"VII.—I will obey all the laws of my country faithfully, and the orders of its monarch, and of all persons appointed to be in authority under its monarch, so far as such laws or commands are consistent with what I suppose to be the law of God; and if they are not, or seem in any wise to need change, I will oppose them loyally and deliberately, not with malicious concealment, or disorderly violence.

"VIII.—And with the same faithfulness, and under the limits of the same obedience, which I render to the law of my country, and the commands of its rulers, I will obey the laws of the Society of St. George, in which I am this day received; and the orders of its masters, and of all persons appointed to be in authority under its masters, so long as I remain a companion called of St. George."

Exception has been taken to several articles of this creed, notably to the fifth, the seventh, and the eighth. Anybody who is fond of sport is bound to object to the fifth, but the criticisms of the other two proceed from a different class of people altogether, from persons who think that the law of the land ought to be supreme over the law of conscience, and that if people were to obey their consciences to the extent of breaking the law of the land there would be a state of anarchy. Our own idea is not precisely this: it seems to us that if we set the law of the land above the law of conscience, and consequently above morality, the whole nation must be at the mercy of brutal governors, or of its own wicked impulses as crystallized in legislation. A case of this kind may be found in the history of Athens, when the Athenian Senate condemned the whole population of Melos to death; and as for the argument that an excess of conscientiousness may lead to anarchy, we would reply, not if the excess extends to the legislators. Yet we admit that

society ought to have some protection from the conscientious monomaniac, the devout Brigham Young, the eloquent Louise Michel, and that the line where conscience ends and fanaticism begins is not easily mapped. However, the objectors might have known that no wild, immoral, anarchic heresy would spring from a company whose other articles of faith were such as are the remaining articles of the creed just quoted in full. Besides, it is clear that the eighth article includes a thorough safeguard against any possible attempt on the part of the St. George's magistrates to pervert the conscience of any one under them.

Unfortunately for Ruskin's society, the age of communities, whether religious or socialistic, is, for most practical purposes, over. The principle of co-operation is, it is true, in the air, but it is being applied on a plane altogether different. The Government, and the institutions under its wing, may be said to have cut the feet of the society of St. George from beneath it; or, perhaps, some would say that Ruskin had unconsciously forced the hand of the Government in the matter of remedying some of the material evils that were still prominent in the early seventies.

It may be that the Conservative reaction is so far responsible, in that it has tended, even amid our atmosphere of progress, to the contempt of those manual arts that Ruskin championed so magnificently, and in the life of his community, made so prominent: the Conservative reaction cannot keep, and no longer tries to keep, people from rising in the world; but it will



not admit the spade into the boudoir. "Nature's gentleman" has gone rather out of fashion these twenty years, to an absolute certainty; and it is one of the problems of the future, now that there is a levelling up<sup>1</sup> in the world, how the world is going to get its rough work done.

At all events, the Company of St. George is a thing of the past, and its founder had the misfortune to see the end of it, as of so many others of his schemes and ideas, though he was so far comforted by the continued existence of some of the off-shoots of the Company, which indeed are thriving at this day, and will be noticed in a subsequent chapter.

Finally, there can be no possible doubt that the idea in the mind of Ruskin, when he commenced his somewhat Utopian enterprise, was that of a return to Nature. He held the opinion, in which there is a certain amount of truth, that the vastness of our great cities, and the complicated life lived in them, are paralyzing our best faculties. Luxury and the desire for it are increasing, and educated men of gentlemanly tastes are becoming infinitely numerous in proportion to the number of appointments which such men would care to occupy. Free libraries in darkened streets cause a cultivation of the worst type of imaginative powers, in the midst of an impossibility of seeing anything of the direct handiwork of God. Therefore the Company of St. George was

<sup>1</sup> Socialists tell us that they level up, not down. But what does it matter? An army in which all the officers are degraded to the ranks will be in no more difficult a position than one in which all the privates are raised to field-m Marshals.

to be, and indeed was, a company in the country, and could, under no circumstances, have a resemblance to one of those settlements, monastic or otherwise, which are to be found buried amid the roar of the mighty town, and conducted by some self-sacrificing university man.

In *On the Old Road* we read as follows:—

“The monotony of life in the central streets of any great modern city, but especially in those of London, where every emotion intended to be derived by men from the sight of nature, or the sense of art, is forbidden for ever, leaves the craving of the heart for a sincere yet changeful interest, to be fed from one source only. Under natural conditions the degree of mental excitement necessary to bodily health is provided by the course of the seasons, and the various skill and fortune of agriculture. In the country, every morning of the year brings with it a new sense of springing or fading nature, new duty to be fulfilled upon earth, and a new promise or warning in heaven. No day is without its innocent hope, its special prudence, its kindly gift, and its sublime danger; and in every process of wise husbandry, and effort of contending or remedial courage, the wholesome passions, pride, and bodily power of the labourer are excited and exerted in happiest unison.

“What thought can enough comprehend the contrast between such life, and that in streets where summer and winter are only alternations of heat and cold; where snow never fell white, nor sunshine clear; where the ground is only a pavement, and the sky no more than the glass roof of an arcade; where the utmost power of a storm is to choke the gutters, and the finest magic of spring change mud into dust; where—chief and most fatal difference in state—there is no change of occupation for any of the inhabitants, but the routine of counter or desk within doors, and the effort to pass each other without collision outside.”

## THIRD QUARTER.

### ARTISTIC LITERATURE AND CRITICISM.

(1860-84.)

## CHAPTER XII.

IN 1877 Ruskin was rather better in health, but in 1878 he was struck down with brain fever of the severest possible type, and only recovered in the autumn to be met by another lion on the path of life, to be dragged into a foolish and undignified, but at the same time, aggravating and exciting conflict.

In 1877, in a review in *Fors Clavigera* of some pictures in the current Academy, he had fallen foul of Mr. J. McNeill Whistler,<sup>1</sup> then not nearly such a power in the Art world as he is at present, but at the same time fighting the last part of his way into the innermost temple thereof. Speaking of the eminent Irish-Parisian's picture, "A Nocturne in Black and Gold," Ruskin said: "For Mr. Whistler's own sake, no less than for the protection of the purchaser, Sir Coutts Lindsay ought not to have

<sup>1</sup> Alive at time of the writing of this MS.

admitted works into the gallery in which the ill-educated conceit of the artist so nearly approached the aspect of wilful imposture. I have seen and heard much of cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb asking two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face." The language, probably used at a moment when the writer was infuriated with things in general, and dejected with one of his innumerable sorrows, was extreme, and, in some degree, reprehensible: we do not mean extreme or, in some degree, reprehensible, as touching the "Nocturne," but as touching the personal character of its painter. We are no art-critics that we should judge, but, speaking as a person not colour-blind, and having the ordinary amount of intellect, we should say that the words, "a pot of paint flung in the public's face," describe not only one, but a great number of Whistler's "Nocturnes." What one cannot admit is that Ruskin had any right to call anyone a coxcomb and ill-educated because his ideas were not according to Turner,<sup>1</sup> or himself, or even Nature. And if Whistler had merely prosecuted Ruskin for common libel, and had refrained from dragging pictures, and the question of their merits, into a court of law, he would very likely have gained a considerable sum of money in damages.

As it was, he sued Ruskin in the Court of Exchequer on Monday, November 15th, before Baron Huddleston and a special jury, for libel both against himself and his paintings.

<sup>1</sup> Who himself often outraged Nature.



"Mr. Whistler, cross-examined by the Attorney-General, said, 'I have sent pictures to the Academy which have not been received. I believe that is the experience of all artists. The "Nocturne in Black and Gold" is a night-piece, and represents the fireworks at Cremorne.'

" 'Not a view of Cremorne?'

" 'If it were called a view of Cremorne, it would certainly bring about nothing but disappointment on the part of the beholders (laughter). It is an artistic arrangement. It was marked two hundred guineas.'

" 'Is that not what we, who are not artists, would call a stiffish price?'

" 'I think it very likely that that may be so.'

" 'But artists always give good value for their money, don't they?'

" 'I am glad to hear that so well established (a laugh). I do not know Mr. Ruskin, or that he holds the view that a picture should only be exhibited when it is finished, when nothing can be done to improve it, but that is a correct view; the arrangement in black and gold was a finished picture; I did not intend to do anything more to it.'

" 'Now, Mr. Whistler, can you tell me how long it took you to knock off that "Nocturne"?''

" 'I beg your pardon?' (Laughter.)

" 'Oh! I am afraid that I am using a term that applies rather perhaps to my own work. I should have said, "How long did it take you to paint that picture"?''

" 'Oh, no! permit me. I am too greatly flattered to think that you apply to work of mine any term that you are in the habit of using with reference to your own. Let us say, then, how long did I take to—"knock off," I think [that is it—knock off that "Nocturne"; well, as well as I remember, about a day.'

" 'Only a day?'

" 'Well, I won't be quite positive; I may have still to put a few more touches to it the next day if the painting were not dry. I had better say, then, that I was two days at work on it.'

" 'Oh, two days! The labour of two days! then is it that for which you ask two hundred guineas?'

" 'No; I ask it for the knowledge of a lifetime.' (Applause.)

“‘You have been told that your pictures exhibit some eccentricities?’

“‘Yes; often.’ (Laughter.)

“‘You send them to the galleries to incite the admiration of the public?’

“‘That would be such vast absurdity on my part that I don’t think I could.’ (Laughter.)

“‘You know that many critics entirely disagree with your views as to these pictures?’

“‘It would be beyond me to agree with the critics.’

“‘You don’t approve of criticism, then?’

“‘I should not disapprove in any way of technical criticism by a man whose whole life is passed in the practice of the science which he criticizes; but for the opinion of a man whose life is not so passed, I would have as little regard as you would if he expressed an opinion on law.’

“‘You expect to be criticized?’

“‘Yes, certainly; and I do not expect to be affected by it until it comes to a case of this kind. It is not only when criticism is inimical that I object to it, but also when it is incompetent. I hold that none but an artist can be a competent critic.’”

Whether none but an artist can be a competent critic may be open to question, and Mr. Tom Taylor, in a letter to Whistler, expresses the opinion that artists ought to thank God that their pictures were not left to the tender mercies of other artists; but this much is true, in spite of what Whistler may have said, that Ruskin was an artist, as nobody who looks at his drawings of Italy can doubt; and though in his later years he exchanged the brush for the pen, it was not from any incompetency in the technique of the painter, but rather from choice: potentially, he was an artist to the last.

Continuing to read the report of the case, we find:—

“‘You put your pictures on the garden-wall, Mr. Whistler, or hang them on the clothes-line, don't you—to mellow?’

“‘I do not understand.’ (The reader will wonder if any one could.)

“‘Do you not put your paintings out into the garden?’

“‘Oh! I understand now. I thought at first that you were again using a term that you are accustomed to yourself. Yes; I certainly do put the canvases into the garden that they may dry in the open air while I am painting, but I should be sorry to see them “mellowed.”’

“‘Why do you call Mr. Irving “an arrangement in black”?’ (Laughter.)

“‘Mr. Baron Huddleston: ‘It is the picture and not Mr. Irving that is the arrangement.’ (Nobody knew this better than the Attorney-General.)

“‘A discussion then ensued as to the inspection of the pictures, and, incidentally, Baron Huddleston remarked that a critic must be competent to form an opinion, and bold enough to express that opinion in strong terms if necessary.”

#### Cross-examination continued:—

“‘What was the substance of the “Nocturne in Blue and Silver” belonging to Mr. Grahame?’

“‘A moonlight effect on the river near old Battersea Bridge.’

“‘What has become of the “Nocturne in Black and Gold”?’ (Another question to gain time.)

“‘I believe it is before you.’ (Laughter.)

“‘The picture called the ‘Nocturne in Blue and Silver’ was now produced in Court.

“‘That is Mr. Grahame's picture. It represents Battersea Bridge by moonlight.’

“‘Baron Huddleston: ‘Which part of the picture is the bridge?’ (Laughter.)

“‘His Lordship earnestly rebuked those who laughed. And witness explained to his Lordship the composition of the picture.”

"The 'Nocturne in Black and Gold' was again produced, and the dialogue continued in the following way:—

"'You have made the study of Art your study of a lifetime. Now do you think that anyone looking at that picture might fairly come to the conclusion that it had no particular beauty?'

"'I have strong evidence that Mr. Ruskin did come to that conclusion.'

"'Do you think it fair that Mr. Ruskin should come to that conclusion?'

"'What might be fair to Mr. Ruskin I cannot answer.'

"'Then you mean, Mr. Whistler, that the initiated in technical matters might have no difficulty in understanding your work. But do you think now that you could make *me* see the beauty of that picture?'

"The witness then paused, and, examining attentively the Attorney-General's face and looking at the picture alternately, said, after apparently giving the subject much thought, while the Court waited in silence for his answer:

"'No! Do you know I fear it would be as hopeless as for the musician to pour his notes into the ear of a deaf man.' (Laughter.)

"'I offer the picture, which I have conscientiously painted, as being worth two hundred guineas. I have known unbiassed people express the opinion that it represents fireworks in a night-scene. I would not complain of any person who might simply take a different view.' (The reader may ask, 'Why were the pictures brought into Court?')

"The Court then adjourned, and after a great deal more discussion, in which Burne-Jones, W. P. Frith, R.A., and Tom Taylor took part as witnesses, the sum of one farthing was awarded to Whistler."

The case was a very unfortunate one altogether, and arose out of what might have been kept in the form of an ordinary difference of opinion. Whistler certainly had a grievance in having been called a coxcomb, and, the days of the duel being over, was so far right in seeking protection and reparation at the hands of the law; but by his manner towards



the magistrates, his exhibition of his pictures in Court, and dilation upon their merits there, did more harm than good.

Of course the case may be looked upon in another and wider light—as a test-battle between pre-Raphaelite and Impressionist, in which the latter gained a Pyrrhic victory legally, and a real and invisible one morally; while the former gained a Pyrrhic victory morally, and a real and visible one legally. Certainly the sale of Whistler's works rose steadily ever afterwards, though this may well have been owing to an increasing excellence; and at the present day the reaction against the school championed by Ruskin is very strong, in spite of the enormous circulation of the books of the great encyclopædic philosopher in every European language. Truth, as usual, seems to be in the middle of things; and it is open to everyone who studies the question to take the following line:—that, while he fully believes in the perfection of the works of creation, or the products of evolution, and the absurdity, and even insolence, of trying to improve upon them individually, he is not going to shut out from his scheme of art what may temporarily appear a non-natural play of the imagination, but rather to defend it as in itself a work of creation, a product of evolution, taking the two vast words in their infinite sense; but, on the other side, that, while he has the most profound reverence for the great imaginations of the wayward geniuses of different times, as something far exceeding most research, and dare not condemn either the construction of composite earthly land-

scapes, if the details have any resemblance to the scattered pieces of country from which they were copied, or the invention of infernal<sup>1</sup> ones visible only in dreams, he is not going to tolerate a production which is only a picture in name, and, apart from all questions of association, is no more decorative than a piece of gold-framed wall-paper,<sup>2</sup> or a board covered with harmonious squares of coloured glass. Whistler would tell us that a picture need not mean anything, provided that it does not offend the eye; he would point to many pieces of music as mere collections of sounds not disagreeable, and ask why painting should not take these as its example. Ruskin, again, favours the idea of pictures that excite a memory or tell a story. The pre-Raphaelite finds perfection in some cathedral interior, which he cannot regard without pathetic thought; the Impressionist finds it in the perpetuation of the momentary iris of a coloured circle of figures past which he flashes on a voyage.

This controversy, which we have thought fit to record to some extent, had a bad effect, as can be imagined, on the already disordered brain of Ruskin. His recovery had not been a very sure one, and the period of convalescence suspiciously long; and in 1879 he was brought down again, from whatever

<sup>1</sup> Infernal. We know nothing more pitiable in Ruskin's life than his attacks on Gustave Doré, whom we look upon as the Edgar Allan Poe of Art, and a soul altogether unique. His work is greater and more terribly beautiful than that of Blake or Dürer.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Taylor's comparison of the fatal "Nocturne." See the *Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, by Whistler.

altitude he had attained on the road back to health, by another attack of cerebral disease. He now had to resign his professorship, and wisely sought a well-earned rest in Switzerland. Even now he would not consent to be idle, but walked out every day, breathing in the air that has acted upon so many heroic invalids like a wine. He began once more to devote himself to the study of glaciers, and kept both his eyes and his books wide open continually. He was now treading upon the favourite ground of Professor Tyndall, then a power in England, and, like the Don Quixote that he too often was, he could not refrain from attacking him, as a revenge for Tyndall's own assaults upon the viscous theory held by Ruskin's friend and master, Professor Forbes. This new controversy was just about as unsatisfactory as the affair with Whistler, and nobody got much benefit from it, but only harm: a large section of the public becoming more confirmed than ever in the idea that Ruskin was a dangerous firebrand.

Missing out the years 1880, 1881, 1882 as unimportant ones, we come to 1883. Ruskin had now recovered his health and mental comfort to a very great extent, and this becoming known in Oxford, a deputation, headed by Sir William Richmond, or rather by the present Sir William Richmond, invited him to resume his professional work in the University. Ruskin returned and delivered the course of lectures, including those published in *The Pleasures of England*, and at the same time continued his efforts, on behalf of the scheme of his old friend William Morris, for the preservation of ancient

buildings, as opposed to their restoration. He also found time to issue a pamphlet,<sup>1</sup> a wild, Apocalyptic piece of imaginative writing, in which he rebukes the times for their wickedness, and refers, as Patrick Walker might have done, to the increasing darkness of the atmosphere above our great British cities.

In the end of 1884 the authorities of Oxford decided to establish a physiological laboratory, wherein experiments like those of Pasteur, near Paris, could be well conducted. It was in no sense a laboratory for vivisection, but vivisection, within the meaning of the Acts which regulate that practice, might be expected to occur now and then, incidentally. When Ruskin heard all the details and probabilities, he was infuriated, and as a Member of the Senatus offered the whole project his sternest opposition. He had said, in his St. George's Creed, that he would not hurt or destroy needlessly any gentle thing, and he now considered that all the results that had accrued to humanity<sup>2</sup> from vivi-

<sup>1</sup> *The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century.*

<sup>2</sup> The results which humanity is supposed to derive from vivisection are rather among the things of the future than among the things of the present. Only two really common diseases have been relieved by it, and then not in its extreme form. We refer to hydrophobia and small-pox, which have been mitigated to a great extent by discoveries, or, rather the results of discoveries, obtained by using animals, but not in such a way as actually to vivisection. In the case of small-pox, an operation corresponding only to vaccination, in fact a form of vaccination, was performed upon a calf; and Pasteur, in order to fight hydrophobia, did not make any appreciable incision in the dogs he used, but gradually weakened them by



section, in the strict sense of the term, had failed to establish its necessity: even if they had, he would have had none of it. Every resource of eloquence and religion he now brought to bear upon the *Senatus*, but all in vain: so, as a last card, he tried the effect of sending in his resignation, as much as to say, "choose between this practice and me." Considering the greatness of the man, probably our grandest prose-writer of the century, and the most versatile person created since God made Voltaire, they might have borne with him upon his own terms, for the few years of active work that were possible to him. But they preferred their laboratory, with its possibilities of what he detested, so that he departed from Oxford and took the road to the North for the last time, or almost the last time.

starvation. Again, if vivisection were never done, except under a complete anæsthesia, extending over the whole length of the operation, we do not think that even Ruskin would have been so bitter against it. But when it is asserted by many authorities that for certain operations, such as one to determine whether living matter can be digested, and, from the result, why the human stomach does not digest itself away, the anæsthesia cannot, should it be permitted at all, be allowed to last all the time, when this is asserted, one can sympathize with the anti-vivisectionist. The text, "God made man with dominion over the creatures," is about the only one that the vivisector is inclined to think inspired in all the Bible.

## FOURTH QUARTER.

### RETIREMENT.

(1884-1900).

### CHAPTER XIII.

RUSKIN was now free to spend his days at his beloved Brantwood among the Cumberland mountains, and with the people whom he considered to be the finest of the English nation, and to make, as a variation, an occasional journey to the Continent. Idle, in the strict sense of the word, he could never be; and even the threat of permanent brain disease could not prevent his indulging in some form or another of leisurely labour during his intervals of health. He completed the *Bible of Amiens*, and added the last papers to the series published as *On the Old Road*; both of these works appeared in their final form in 1885.

With the *Bible of Amiens* we will not deal in this small book, as there are so many more important matters to consider, but of *On the Old Road*, with which, by the way, the *Construction of Sheepfolds* has been incorporated, something must be said. To begin with, the remarks that we made about *Fors*

*Clavigera* might be so far applied to this book also: it covers a period of fifty-one years, the earliest piece of writing in it being a letter written by Ruskin at the age of fifteen, that is to say, in 1834, on the strata of Mont Blanc, and the latest an article, or, rather a preface on "Usury," written in 1885. The most interesting things, to our mind, in the volume, are the refutation of some economic theories countenanced by the late W. R. Greg, a controversy on the subject of usury with the bishop of Manchester, and a series of notes on natural science.

To take the first of these items, it appears that Mr. Greg had called in question something that Mr. Goldwin Smith and others had been laying down as law in the *Contemporary Review*, and that Ruskin had advanced to the attack of Mr. Greg. Mr. Greg had stated what we saw repeated in the *Graphic* only the other day—namely, that a man given to boundless personal extravagance was really a useful member of the community, and one to be, though not necessarily actually applauded, in no wise condemned, insomuch as he put money in circulation. Ruskin points out that persons who drink port wine out of buckets are also putting money in circulation, but cannot be said to be doing much good with it in the passage, either to themselves or to anyone connected with them: and he goes on to make out, as he does in *Unto this Last*, that the important thing is not where money goes, but just this incidental result of it in its passage. And while one may not go the length of approving of the sumptuary laws at which he hints in one or

two of his books, one can still see plainly that the talk in society papers about the benefactions of gilded personages who let themselves be fleeced by tradesmen, to make a London season, is nonsense: an involuntary philanthropist is not one.

In the controversy with the Bishop of Manchester, Ruskin does not come off nearly so well, and, in our private opinion, gets considerably the worst of it; and truly, it is no easy matter for any man to succeed in demonstrating that the demand for interest upon sums advanced is immoral. Indeed, we think that the proposition in *Time and Tide*, to the effect that all persons owning land should become State *pensionaries* in lieu of receiving rent—in fact, that the whole people should pay what a limited class of tenant farmers owe, is more immoral by far.

As for the notes upon natural science, they are altogether remarkable as proceeding from a man who had no technical scientific training at all, except what he gave himself in the intervals of his literary work. Those in the second volume of *On the Old Road* deal with the following subjects: The Colour of the Rhine, 1834; The Strata of Mont Blanc, 1834; The Induration of Sandstone, 1836; The Temperature of Spring and River Water, 1836; Meteorology, 1839; Tree Twigs, 1861; Stratified Alps of Savoy, 1866; Intellectual Conception and Animated Life, 1871. Besides these three items that we have now dealt with and enumerated, and on which a fuller attention ought, in a work of a larger scope than ours, to be bestowed, the Inaugural Rede Lecture at Cambridge, delivered



on the 29th of October 1858, is included, and deserves a very careful and sympathetic study.

Then, in this last quarter of his life, Ruskin occupied a great deal of his time with mineralogy. In his more robust hours he went out short distances and collected specimens of native crystals, accompanied by his friend, secretary, and biographer, Mr. Collingwood, or else by his cousin, Mrs. Severn, or her husband. The Lake district of England is a famous mineralogical field, and if one does not find something of interest there, one will not find it in these islands. In his feebler hours he went over his exquisitely arranged cabinets with the lens, always delighted to enlighten or to satisfy any visitor. One of his great weaknesses was for uncut gems, even as one of his great repugnances was for cut ones, and his favourite branch of mineralogy was crystallography, especially so far as it dealt with crystalline formations in the category of gems,<sup>1</sup> or approaching that category. His collection must have been worth several thousands of pounds, if all accounts be true, one uncut diamond alone costing a thousand. There were little piles of gold dust,

<sup>1</sup> It is no easy matter to decide what are precious stones; some people do not include cat's-eyes, while the Apocalypse of Saint John includes a great deal more. We read in Chapter xxi., verses 18-21: "And the building of the wall of it was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth;

and isolated gold nuggets as well, some from California and some from Wales, and an immense number of the humbler stones, such as agates, jaspers, and chalcedonies. Any book in which jewels were mentioned interested the enthusiastic collector, and he himself wrote a *Dictionary of Minerals*, in which the highly coloured and curiously shaped among them come in for very special attention. He loved the pink rods of tourmaline, the pebbles that represent Bohemian glass, and those radial crystalline masses, the colour and shape of echinoids.

Then there was much time spent in the elaboration of maps, to illustrate his innumerable journeys on the European continent; few of these maps are highly finished, but many of them have a wonderful vigour of draughtsmanship, and all of them emphasize the point or the route to which Ruskin wishes to attract special attention; in the majority of cases, the geology of the district concerned is well revealed. Nor were such pleasures as music and reading forgotten; he was no musician, in the strict sense of the word, although he made several attempts at composition, and speaks, in *Præterita*, of hoping one day to instruct people in the arts

the twelfth, an amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass." Here it will be seen that the jasper and the chalcedony are tacitly placed on an equality with the sapphire and the emerald; yet, as we say, some people hesitate about admitting the cat's-eye, and even the beryl, both of them ranking above the jasper and the chalcedony, into the charmed circle of jewels. Ruskin was liberal, and set a high value on every beautiful crystalline form.

of playing and singing—but he enjoyed music immensely, and would listen to a violin or a good voice for hours of an evening. As for his library, it was, though a comparatively small one, yet a fine one; many of Scott's original manuscripts were in it, and the glorious first edition of the *Earthly Paradise*, with an inscription of presentation by William Morris himself; there also were innumerable Bibles, beginning with the fourteenth century Scandinavian one called "King Hakon's Bible" down to the English "Breeches Bible"; and great architectural works, whose number includes the celebrated *Dictionnaire de l'Architecture* of Viollet le Duc. The *Fragments* of St. Patrick were there, and one of the almost priceless manuscripts of the *Nuremberg Chronicle*. Among the poets, his favourite, Byron,<sup>1</sup> held a prominent place, and the collection of novels was most catholic, ranging from the old *Harry and Lucy* of Miss Edgeworth to the *Consuelo* of George Sand. Science was very fully represented, and not in any merely popular form.

Finally, a study of the house at Brantwood, or rather of what the house contained, following a perusal of the works of the great author himself, would have convinced most people that Ruskin bears a close resemblance to the Encyclopædists of the eighteenth century in everything except religion, for no department of Art was altogether

<sup>1</sup> The statement quoted of Ruskin, to the effect that "Scott was of the world, worldly; Burns of the flesh, fleshly; and Byron of the devil, damnable," must have been made during one of his attacks of cerebral disease.

out of his range; in no branch of Science, except Comparative Anatomy, did he feel himself at a loss; upon every issue of politics he could speak with some authority. Had he given up his time to the study of botany to the extent to which he gave it to that of painting and sculpture, he might not have been a Hooker, but he might have been a Watson or an Oliver. In field zoology, particularly ornithology, he was nearly as great, as things stood, as Gilbert White of Selborne, or Thomas Edwards; there was very little of the flora and fauna of any district in which he had spent some time that he did not know. He had a patient power of observation which can scarcely be paralleled outside of the life of Darwin; he would watch a single eddy in a stream for four or five hours on end, a chestnut twig for twenty or thirty minutes, and would spend a week over a cliff face; in fact, it was want of inclination, and not want of ability, that prevented him from being one of the greatest scientific recorders of the age.

Again, like most of the leaders of thought, Ruskin could take an intense joy in what was very simple, and among other employments gardening pleased him exceedingly. Greenhouses he could not abide, and even flowerbeds he disliked, but he loved the half wild garden where the wood anemones open under the trees. He threw the catalogues of nurserymen in the fire, and believed what are called "new bedding hybrids" to be abominations unto God and man. He wanted neither a forest, nor a common villa domain, but a piece of enchanted



ground such as William Morris describes in some of his legendary tales, the sort of place which Botticelli uses as the setting for the demigod Spring, and her nymphs pale and altogether exquisite. The country round about was moorland, and Ruskin, while determined to pursue his own inclinations in the immediate neighbourhood of his house, would not spoil the general effect of the landscape. Mr. Collingwood writes as follows:—

“Just as a portrait-painter studies to pose his sitter in such a light and in such an attitude as to bring out the most individual points and get the revelation of a personality, so Ruskin studied his moor, to develop its resources.

“First there were the streams; and his old theory of saving the water suggested impounding the trickle in a series of reservoirs; it might be useful in case of drought or fire. So we were marshalled with pick and spade, every fair afternoon, to the ‘Board of Works,’ as we called it, and the old game of the Hincksey diggings was played over again. For what reason I never clearly understood, Juniper was condemned on the moor, as convolvulus in the wood; and every savin-bush, as it is called in the district, was to be uprooted, while the heather was treasured. When the basins were formed, he found to his regret that no mere earthen bank would hold the water; and skilled labour had to be called in to build dams of stone and cement, less pretty than the concealed dyke he had intended. But there was some consolation in devising sluices and clever gates with long clever handles, artistically curved, to shut and open the slit. One would have thought, sometimes, to see his eagerness over these inventions, that he had missed his vocation; but everyone likes to play at civil engineering. And when all was done, it was a favourite entertainment to send up somebody to turn the water on and produce a roaring cascade among the laurels opposite the front door.

“Next, to illustrate his theory of reclaiming wastes, he set about his moorland garden. At the upper corner of this beck-course there was one ragged bit of ground against the fence wall. From

the more rocky parts we were set to carry the soil to make terraces, which we walled up with the rough stones found in plenty under the surface. One wetter patch was planted with cranberries, and some apple and cherry-trees were planted where the soil was deep, and the drainage provided. No wall or wire parted this little space of tillage from the wilder moor and its rabbits, for the design was to enlarge the cultivated area and make the moor a paradise of terraces like the top of the purgatorial mount in Dante; and since this fragment of an experiment was completed, when strength no longer allowed him to stride up to this once favourite height, the whole has been left to Nature again. The apple-trees grew, but untended; they still blossom. The cherries have run wild and are left to the birds. The rough steps from the rock-platform to the orchard terrace are disjointed, and fern is creeping through the grass.

But yet from out the little hill,  
Oozes the slender springlet still,

as it did in those old Brantwood days when we picked and shovelled together, first unearthing its miniature ravine; and as perhaps it may—for no one can foretell the fate of any sacred spot—when the pilgrim of the future tries to identify by its help alone the whereabouts of Ruskin's deserted garden."

It will be seen from this quotation that the great author of *The Poetry of Architecture* endeavoured to put into practice the principles laid down by him more than fifty years before in that volume, to the effect that it is the business of man to conceal his necessary interference with Nature, and not to parade it.

And it was here, in this beautiful, quiet solitude, that this man, upon whom half the academies of half a world had showered, or attempted to shower their honours, wrote, in his declining, yet not altogether unhappy years, his memoirs of an early life, luxurious yet isolated and simple, using for this

purpose an ink which seems to be mingled with some blood from the heart. It is not a case of Faust, terrified to die, gazing back upon a lifetime of meaningless secular learning, interspersed with worse still, but a case resembling that of the old monk in the etching of Albrecht Durer, the monk who sits in a kind of belfry, overlooking a wide and illuminated champaign, while Death himself tolls the bell very slowly and peacefully; and yet it is a case in which there is so much untiring joy in the glory of the visible world left in the heart that there is a flaw in the resemblance to that of the monk; and an element of a resemblance to a third case altogether different from it; there is, in fact, a suggestion of the position of the returned wanderers in the *Earthly Paradise*, who sit

“Twixt inaccessible cliffs and unsailed sea,  
Quiet-eyed and waiting—for Eternity.”

There is a hope for the “Outre-Tombe,” but it is pensive and resigned, rather than anxious and exuberant, and an absence of that distaste for earthly things, and weariness of them, which makes the Great Change so desirable for the monastic.

Most of the material companionships which go to make existence more interesting and exciting to us, had, in Ruskin's case, terminated only too soon; but he made the last period of his life a charmed one, by means of their reminiscence: he walked in a dim garden, like the one that surrounded Brantwood, and met his old loves, as Dante met Beatrice, amid its mystic trees whose shadows were divided by

transcendental moonbeams. No one ever used the inner eye of solitude to better effect, and no one ever found meditation easier than he. Dates he may forget, but incidents never.

Therefore *Præterita* is full of interest, and may be looked upon as entirely accurate, so far as it goes. *Præterita* is the book of memoirs to which we have referred, and which was issued in the middle of the seventh decade of his life. Its pathos, of course, is very largely due to the extent of time that has elapsed between the occurrence of the majority of the events in it, and their record, as is the case with all similar works, but after all allowance has been made for this well-understood fact, after the aberration of the autobiographic ray has been corrected, there is an imperishable residue. Human life, as we can record it, is essentially a material thing, and centres round little material matters, such as the hanging up of a hat, or the accident to a pony-chaise; and nothing can be more tenderly impressive than the story of the little economies of Herne Hill, or of the vagaries of the servant Anne. As for the reticence with which the author surrounds the closing days of his parents, it springs from an emotion too deep for tears, and not from any less worthy motive: we have compared Ruskin to a French Encyclopædist of the eighteenth century, but there is one point in which he is different from such a person, and that point is his power of decent secrecy, not only in regard to what is shameful, but in regard to what is, or ought to be unnerving. If he breaks this tacit rule of his, in the case of Adèle



Domecq, it is because the love-affair is so long past that he is scarcely able to appreciate what his own feelings were at the time, or at least to summon them back now for a ghostly rehearsal.

As for the description which *Præterita* contains of child-life in a suburban garden, we know little in biographical literature to equal it, and only two pieces in fiction to surpass it, one of these being the beginning of the *Peter Ibbetson* of George Du Maurier. And here we cannot forbear from quoting from *On the Old Road* something that has a bearing upon the contents of *Præterita*:—

“In my young days, Croxsted Lane was a green by-road traversable for some distance by carts; but rarely so traversed, and, for the most part, little else than a narrow strip of untilled field, separated by blackberry hedges from the better-cared-for meadows on each side of it: growing more weeds, therefore, than they, and perhaps in spring a primrose or two—white archangel—daisies plenty, and purple thistles in autumn. A slender rivulet, boasting little of its brightness, for there are no springs at Dulwich, yet fed purely enough by the rain and morning dew, here trickled—there loitered—through the long grass beneath the hedges, and expanded itself, where it might, into moderately clear and deep pools, in which, under their veils of duck-weed, a fresh-water shell or two, sundry curious little skipping shrimps, any quantity of tadpoles in their time, and sometimes even a tittlebat, offered themselves to my boyhood’s pleased, and not inaccurate, observation. There, my mother and I used to gather the first buds of the hawthorn; and there, in after years, I used to walk in the summer shadows, as in a place wilder and sweeter than our garden, to think over any passage I wanted to make better than usual in *Modern Painters*.

“On the first kindly day of this year I went to look again at the old place.

“The lane itself, now entirely grassless, is a deep-rutted, heavy

hillocked cart-road, diverging gatelessly into various brickfields or pieces of waste; and bordered on each side by heaps of—Hades only knows what!—mixed dust of every unclean thing that can crumble in drought, and mildew of every unclean thing that can rot or rust in damp.”

And as one gets on in *Præterita*, one understands why Ruskin does not care to visit old familiar haunts quite so much, or why, at least, he does not record his visits to the same extent. In fact, the Ruskin of these last two books is very much in the position of the hero of the *Odyssey* returning to Ithaca, or like Tom Brown revisiting Rugby and finding that his mark is wearing out; and this parallel, referring to material things connected with Ruskin, might be employed with regard to the place held by his philosophy in the minds of the present generation. But even as the hero of Homer’s tale must have felt, in his darkest hour, some consolation in the vision of the Ithacensian hills, so Ruskin found some in the contemplation of his more northerly ones. And although one of the volumes of *Modern Painters* is devoted to mountain beauty, Ruskin himself admits, that it was not till hope after hope, friend after friend departed, and he turned to the physical heights for mere consolation, that he fully appreciated what he had been saying so eloquently for so many years.

The following passage from *Præterita* is of interest in this connection:—

“I cannot be sure of the date of either Miss Withers’ or Miss Wardell’s death; that of Sybilla Dowie (told in *Fors*), more sad than either, was much later; but the loss of her sweet spirit, following her lover’s, had been felt by us before the time of which

I am now writing. I had never myself seen Death, nor had any part in the grief or anxiety of a sick chamber; nor had I ever seen, far less conceived, the misery of unaided poverty. But I had been made to think of it; and in the deaths of the creatures whom I had seen joyful, the sense of deep pity, not sorrow for myself, but for them, began to mingle with all the thoughts, which, founded on the Homeric, Æschylean, and Shakespearian tragedy, had now begun to modify the untried faith of childhood. The blue of the mountains became deep to me with the purple of mourning, the clouds that gather round the setting sun, not subdued, but raised in awe as the harmonies of a Miserere, and all the strength and frame-work of my mind, lurid like the vaults of Roslyn, when weird fire gleamed on its pillars, foliage-bound, and far in the depth of twilight, 'blazed every rose-carved buttress fair.'"

## FOURTH QUARTER.

### RETIREMENT.

(1884-1900).

## CHAPTER XIV.

### DEATH—RUSKINIANA—CRITICAL ESTIMATE.

IN 1882, Ruskin had made a journey into the north of France, and studied to some extent in the glorious Gothic cathedrals of that region. And in 1888 he again went to the Continent, this time for pure relaxation, and the recovery of health after one of his innumerable attacks of illness; he failed, however, to derive the old benefit which he had been wont to derive, and never again felt fit for travel of any kind. Nor since *Præterita* did he write anything more of importance, although he seems to have continued to make synopses of books and catalogues of ideas. His literary efforts became confined to letters and pamphlets, such as the magazine article against cycling, issued in 1886, an article inspired by his great desire for a return to Nature, for a reversion to the use of unaided human power alone, and his



dislike of excursionists. The first Duke of Wellington had opposed the introduction of the modern third-class carriage on the railway, on the ground that it gave "many idle people the means of travelling about the country," and in some things the Duke of Wellington and Ruskin were very much alike. We often wonder if they ever met, say at Court, or whether the Duke ever read *Modern Painters*.

But now the old fighting power was gone, and possibly the old fighting inclination with it; so that for the last twelve years of his life Ruskin filled the capacity of a quiet country gentleman minus sport. Now and then there were gleams of honour and glory, as when there called at Brantwood some reverent Royal Academician, or some mercurial member of the French Academy, the latter not forgetting the great man's burning sympathy for France in the dark days of the Commune. Distinctions of all sorts poured in upon him; nor did London, Paris, and even Berlin and New York withhold from him the cornucopias of praise. His "crowning mercy" came to him upon his eightieth birthday, when he received the great national address, dark with the signatures of innumerable people, and ennobled with the autograph of Albert Edward himself.

His friend and fellow-worker, William Morris, had gone, in 1896, that is, two years prior to the presentation; and in the summer of 1898 Sir Edward Burne-Jones, his fellow-worker in a different sphere, and a closer friend still, had taken the same path: so that, in the midst of a congratulating world

Ruskin felt in some respects lonely; but for the constant and gentle care of the Severn family, and of his secretary and biographer, Mr. Collingwood, he would have been inclined to say, like the Princess Mathilde Buonaparte, as she lay the other year on her death-bed, "I am an anachronism." As it was, all his intellectual peers, or nearly all of them, assuredly all of them that had anything in common with himself, were of the past. The man whose eloquence had practically created the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood now saw himself survive it: he was King Arthur minus the Round Table. Yet, as will be inferred from the absence of anything of an outstanding or exciting character in the biographies, this last stage of his career was very far from being unhappy; he was making the descent into Euthanasia. We cannot forbear from quoting the memorable words of Sir Benjamin Ward Richardson respecting the condition so named: they are as follow:—

"Euthanasia is the sequel of health, the happy death engrafted on the perfect life. When the physician has taught the world how this benign process of Nature may be secured, and the world has accepted the lesson, death itself will be practically banished; it will be divested equally of fear, of sorrow, of suffering. It will come as a sleep. If you ask me what proof there is of the possibility of such a consummation, I point to our knowledge of the natural phenomena of one form of dissolution revealed to us even now, in perfect, though exceptional illustration.

"Ten times in my own observation I remember witnessing, with attentive mind, these phenomena of natural Euthanasia. Without pain, anger, or sorrow, the intellectual faculties of the fated man lose their brightness. Ambition ceases, or sinks into desire for

repose. Ideas of time, of space, of duty, lingeringly pass away. To sleep, and not to dream, is the pressing, and, step by step, still pressing need; until at length it whiles away all the hours. The awakenings are short and shorter; painless, careless, happy awakenings to the hum of a busy world, to the merry sounds of children at play, to the sounds of voices offering aid; to the effort of talking on simple topics and recalling events that have dwelt longest on the memory; and then again the overpowering sleep."

On the 18th of January 1900, Ruskin's wearied constitution was attacked by influenza, and he felt an uneasiness devoid of any acute pain. On the 19th he was better, and smiled upon the friendly faces that had watched over him for nearly twenty years. On the 20th, he fell gently asleep during the day, as had been his custom for so long a time, and never awoke. The heart had stopped, on the verge of his eighty-first anniversary.

As a rule, far too much literary attention is lavished upon the death-beds and funerals of celebrated men, as though these were the most important things about them, which they are not. And what we have recorded of the last days of Ruskin, and now record of his burial, is sufficient. The burial, at his own pre-expressed wish, took place in Coniston churchyard, not in Westminster Abbey, and there was no gloomy pomp or ceremonial, things which, as Montaigne and Bacon have wisely said, make up half the terror of death.

How thankful the people of this country must be that they gave this genius some token of their appreciation before he left the world altogether. As a rule, they are experts at pouring gold into coffins,

or blazoning it into stained-glass windows; and they do not treat their literary men well; in many of their great newspapers more fuss is made about some local farmer and the new breed of cattle which he has invented, and the silver cup which his wife has given to some one who has had the genius to drive past a grand-stand faster, and with a better-dressed groom, than some one else—more fuss than about any except the best-advertised authors. And even in the case of the very ablest writers it is necessary to be dead to be celebrated. But Ruskin is too great to be set aside; he is universal, like a natural phenomenon, or like Shakespeare; there is no escaping him, for if one of his sayings miss you, another will strike you; his eyes follow you round the Vanity Fair of life, into every stall of it, like the eyes of an old-fashioned portrait. And it is just because he is so universal that he lacks the concentration of energy necessary to make a revolution. The men that make revolutions are not those that appeal to all the universe, like Holy Scripture, but those that appeal to half the universe to confiscate the other half; for it is against reason that one should have a revolution with no one opposing; and so Ruskin, like William Morris, never became a great leader of a democratic host. He attracted everybody a little, and some persons much; he was the Napoleon of a Grand Army minus privates;<sup>1</sup> he had a few words for a whole world, and a whole world of words for a few. We are speaking of him now as the Socialist who would have had us abolish

<sup>1</sup> Statement made with mental reservations.



our whole system of banks and investments, and let our costly mechanical contrivances rust, who would have knocked down half of our laborious buildings, and tied ourselves down by sumptuary laws. The power of the Ruskin who would do all this, for good or for evil, is at present in inverse ratio to the spread of his masterpieces.

But we dare not speak thus of Ruskin in his capacity of the Plato of the nineteenth century, of the apostle of Beauty. In this capacity he has done more for us than he knew, though less than he hoped. He has been more than a peripatetic Greek, or the incarnation of the Camden Society; he has proved that the decks must not and cannot be garlanded until the hold ceases to leak and to rot. Good Art, he would say, is no more to be persistently pursued and successfully continued, with an internal war proceeding in the nation, than if hostile artillery rained shells upon the capital. Nor, until Ruskin arrived,<sup>1</sup> was Art appreciated among us, it having ceased to respect itself, struggling to exist amid impossibilities.

And although, even in Art, there seems to be a present and conquering reaction against his teaching, it ought to be remembered, by him that observes, that the course of all movements (their evolution, if you will) is in spirals, and that our impressionists and reviewers may be leading us upon one of the downward semi-circles. Whistler may be a phase in painting, as Chamberlain in politics and Strauss in music. The most broken

<sup>1</sup> We do not mean "never," but for a long time previously.

law of the old Greeks is their "do nothing too much," and Ruskin may suffer for having been numbered with the breakers, like Knox, Newman, Mirabeau, Carlyle, and Zola. Yet what a vast permanent residue of the divine, the Purgatorial fires, if there are any, must leave in him. The safely changing beauty of God's universe is with him in the main, and he has brought it within the vista of the hitherto blind, making sight to the utmost relatively possible. Nor is he a mere æsthete, as not realizing that there was Art before one sacked Constantinople, or pillaged Japan, or as holding it the ideal to make common to the workman what the duke had bankrupted himself in purchasing. His real business is with the great, cheap things, that cannot be repeated or duplicated, the divine things got for nothing—the spectacle of all the best things that man sees God make, and the use of all the free, reverend things that God sees man make—the solemnity,<sup>1</sup> possessed by paupers, of Amiens; the appearance, possessed by prisoners, of the sky unsoiled, the sea unrelieved upon.

One can readily realize his reasons for objecting to everything that people do to rob themselves of these great cheap things, in the lust to make money, veiling men from the unsoiled sky with the infernal bouquet that leaves tall chimneys; stopping the brook that should have been eternal, and completing their work with foul porcelain. One can appreciate his view, that the loss is not merely sensuous, but also intellectual and moral. Voltaire said, "There

<sup>1</sup> "The solemnity," note, not its visible appurtenances.

cannot be a box without a carpenter." True; "but if one cannot see the box," one cannot be expected to acknowledge him. And, assuredly Ruskin's own life is one long argument in favour of the preservation of all Beauty that is on this planet. It was the vision of the Alps from the Schaffhausen road that made him our Plato; it was the vision of them from elsewhere that consoled him in his darkest hours; it was in the valleys of the Jura that he, time after time, regained his interest in life; and what, at the last, of all things material, made this world tolerable, and cast a light of promise on the worlds to come, if it were not the uninterrupted levels of Coniston, and beyond them the passive mountains, where the passing storm would roar against the sunset, till the long ranks of living cloud seemed, as it were, tempestuous armies driven by the thunder of the wings of the Ages, flaming into Valhalla?

Touching Ruskin as a moral teacher, it may be observed that he was more of a power fifty years ago than he is at present, and that if his system is no longer made the object of insulting attacks, it is either because he himself is dead, or because the moral atrophy of the country has become so deep, that the thrust of his ever-present lancet fails to irritate it. Those who have headed the reaction against the ethical principles so dear to Ruskin are, in the individual and social sphere, the followers of Hæckel and Nietzsche, and, in the international sphere, Bismarck, Salisbury, and the successive rulers of the United States of America. We know few things less in accordance with the ideas

of Ruskin (we need not say Christianity), than the dismemberment of Denmark by Bismarck, the conduct of Lord Salisbury's government in Africa, or the cowardly advantage taken of the weakness of Spain by the McKinley Government, to rob her of the last of her colonies. And the fact that whole masses of men, as a rule, comparatively moral, such as the British missionaries in Rhodesia, only recently supported such a policy as one of the three mentioned, shows how far we have travelled, and how strong the reaction is against the tenets of this profound genius, as against those of Mazzini, Bright, and Gladstone.

But while it is on the knees of the gods whether Ruskin as a force is to regain the ground that he seems to have lost in the meantime in the fields of sociology, art, morality, and politics, the eye may be directed to the remaining tangible products of his vast philanthropic purpose. Left with a fortune of about two hundred thousand pounds, he spent seven-eighths of it for what he conceived to be the good of humanity. The dying St. George's scheme drank in money like a sponge; but it has left behind it the noble St. George's Museum in Sheffield. There people of all classes have the advantage of a picture gallery, a library, and three museum halls, one devoted to botany, one to zoology, and one to geology: very frequently did the voice of the Master ring in that place, when he spake, like a character in the Bible, of the Earth and all that was thereon, and all that was in the air, or under the earth, and of the great and wide sea and all that was therein.



Again, taking the rose as the flower associated with England, and consequently with St. George, Ruskin had, in 1879, founded Societies of the Rose for the encouragement of true art of the people. These societies mostly became extinct, but have been replaced by the Ruskin Union, which now has living branches in almost every large city, and an influence which we find it hard to estimate. Then there stands in Oxford the affiliated hall known as Ruskin Hall, which has been opened in accordance with the wishes of the Master, to the effect that ambitious young men of the working class might become foster-children of Alma Mater and drink the milk of knowledge from her breast—fresh, ever exquisite, and ever young. All this must have demanded the sacrifice of immense sums of money, and consequently of many vast desires depending thereupon, and yet it is not all by any means. What of the struggling artists educated, many of them now living? What of the bankrupt institutions saved? What of the settlements in the East End of London? What of the rabbit-warrens evacuated in exchange for the tenements associated with the name of Miss Octavia Hill? Really, the generousities of this man, as far as we know them, are limitless, and we do not know them far.

Master he is often called, and master he is; first or past master in eloquence only, perhaps, but very great in all things. Philanthropist, orator, draughtsman, scientist, preacher, poet, politician, essayist, and professor. Except Bacon, Voltaire, and Goethe, no living human being has, in the whole scope of

modern times, been able to fulfil the functions of all these as he fulfilled them. The three universal philosophers are perhaps his equals in dignity of mind and in powers of deduction, but far inferior to him in moral purpose. In that he stands alone, or almost alone, a solitary, pathetic figure, now lost, and now almost demented, now going wrong, or seeming to go wrong, but never commonplace, and ever and anon rising into true form and semblance, against some unholy thing, first to gleam white with speechless lightning, and then to utter voices of thunder.

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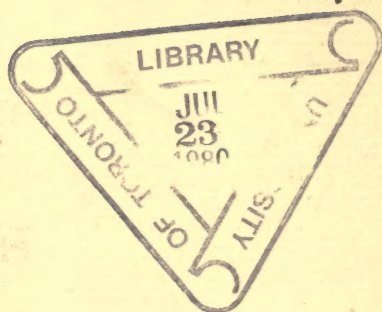
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